THE YOKE

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THE YOKE

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A ROMANCE OF THE DAYS WHEN THE LORD REDEEMED THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL FROM THE BONDAGE OF EGYPT

BY

ELIZABETH MILLER

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JANUARY

TO

PERCY MILLER

MY BROTHER

WHO CONSTRUCTED

THE PLOT

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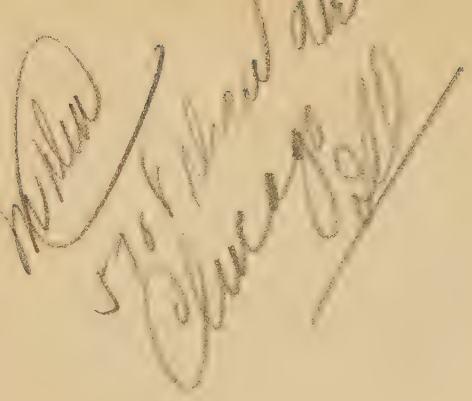
THE YOKE



THE YOKE

A STORY OF THE EXODUS

CHAPTER I

CHOOSING THE TENS

Near the eastern boundary of that level region of northern Egypt, known as the Delta, once thridded by seven branches of the sea-hunting Nile, Rameses II, in the fourteenth century B. C., erected the city of Pithom and stored his treasure therein. His riches overtaxed its coffers and he builded Pa-Ramesu, in part, to hold the overflow. But he died before the work was completed by half, and his fourteenth son and successor, Meneptah, took it up and pushed it with the nomad bond-people that dwelt in the Delta.

The city was laid out near the center of Goshen, a long strip of fertile country given over to the Israelites since the days of the Hyksos king, Apepa, near the year 1800 B. C.

Morning in the land of the Hebrew dawned over level fields, green with unripe wheat and meadow grass. Wherever the soil was better for grazing great flocks of sheep moved in compact clouds, with a lank dog and an ancient shepherd following them.

The low, shapeless tents and thatched hovels of the

Israelites stood in the center of gardens of lentils, garlic and lettuce, securely hedged against the inroads of hares and roving cattle. Close to these were compounds for the flocks and brush inclosures for geese, and cotes for the pigeons used in sacrifice. Here dwelt the aged in trusteeship over the land, while the young and sturdy builded Pa-Ramesu.

Sunrise on the uncompleted city tipped the raw lines of her half-built walls with broken fire and gilded the gear of gigantic hoisting cranes. Scaffolding, clinging to bald façades, seemed frail and cobwebby at great height, and slabs of stone, drawn and held by cables near the summit of chutes, looked like dice on the giddy slide.

Below in the still shadowy passages and interiors, speckled with fallen mortar, lay chains, rubble of brick and chipped stone; splinters, flinders and odd ends of timber; scraps of metal, broken implements and the what-not that litters the path of construction. Without, in the avenues, vaguely outlined by the slowly rising structures on either side, were low-riding, long, heavy, dwarf-wheeled vehicles and sledges to which men, not beasts, had been harnessed. Here, also, were great cords of new brick and avalanches of glazed tile where disaster had overtaken orderly stacks of this multi-tinted material. In the open spaces were covered heaps of sand, and tons of lime, in sacks; lavers of paint and hogsheads of tar; ingots of copper and pigs of bronze. Roadways, beaten in the dust by a multitude of bare feet, led in a hundred directions, all merging in one great track toward the camp of the laboring Israelites.

This was pitched in a vast open in the city's center,

wherein Rameses II had planned to build a second Karnak to Imhotep. Under the gracious favor of this, the physician god, the great Pharaoh had regained his sight. But death stayed his grateful hand and Meneptah forgot his father's debt. Here, then, year in and year out, an angular sea of low tents sheltered Israel.

Let it not be supposed that all the sons of Abraham were here. Thousands labored yet in the perfection of Pithom, on the highways of the Lower country, and on the Rameside canal, and the greater number made the brick for all Egypt in the clay-fields of the Delta. Therefore, within the walls of Pa-Ramesu there were somewhat more than three thousand Hebrews, men, women and children.

On a slight eminence, overlooking the camp, were numerous small structures of sun-dried brick, grouped about one of larger dimensions.. Above this was raised a military standard, a hawk upon a cross-bar, from which hung party-colored tassels of linen floss. By this sign, the order of government was denoted. The Hebrews were under martial law.

The camp was astir. Thin columns of blue smoke drifted up here and there between the close-set tents, and the sibilant wearing of stone-mills, as they ground the wheat, was heard in many households. The nutty aroma of parching lentils, and the savor of roasting papyrus root and garlic told the stage of the morning meal. The strong-armed women, rich brown in tint from the ardent sun, crowned with coil upon coil of heavy hair, bent over the pungent fires. Sturdy children, innocent of raiment, went hither and thither, bearing well filled skins of water. Apart from these

were the men of Israel, bearded and grave, stalwart and scantily clad. They repaired a cable or fitted an ax-handle or mended a hoe. But they were full of serious and absorbed discourse, for the great Hebrew, Moses, from the sheep-ranges of Midian, had been among them, showing them marvels of sorcery, preaching Jehovah and promising freedom. The first high white light of dawn was breaking upon the century-long night of Israel.

Before one of the tents an old woman knelt beside a bed of live coals, turning a browning water-fowl upon a pointed stick. She was a consummate cook, and the bird was fat and securely trussed. Now and again she sprinkled a pinch of crude salt on the embers to suppress the odor of the burning drippings, and lifted the fowl out of the reach of the pale flames that leaped up thereafter. Presently she removed the fowl and forked it off the spit into a capacious earthenware bowl near by. Then, with green withes as tongs, she drew forth a round tile from under the coals and set it over the dish to complete the baking. From another tile-platter at hand she took several round slices of durra bread and proceeded to toast them with much skill, tilting the hot tile and casting each browned slice in on the fowl as it was done. When she had finished, she removed the cover and set the bowl on the large platter, protecting her hands from its heat with a fold of her habit. With no little triumph and some difficulty she got upon her feet and carried the toothsome dish into her shelter, to place it beyond the reach of stealthy hands. No such meal was cooked that morning, elsewhere, in Pa-Ramesu, except at the military headquarters on the knoll.

There was little inside the tent, except the meagerest essential furnishing. A long amphora stood in a tamarisk rack in one corner; a linen napkin hung, pinned to the tent-cloth, over it; a glazed laver and a small box sat beside it. A mat of braided reeds, the handiwork of the old Israelite, covered the naked earth. This served as seat or table for the occupants. Several wisps of straw were scattered about and a heap of it, over which a cotton cloak had been thrown, lay in one corner.

"Rachel," the old woman said briskly.

Evidently some one slept under the straw, for the heap stirred.

"Rachel!" the old woman reiterated, drawing off the cloak.

Without any preliminary pushing away of the straw, a young girl sat up. A little bewildered, she divested her head and shoulders of a frowsy straw thatch and stood erect, shaking it off from her single short garment.

She was not more than sixteen years old. Above medium height and of nobler proportions than the typical woman of the race, her figure was remarkable for its symmetry and utter grace. The stamp of the countenance was purely Semitic, except that she was distinguished, most wondrously in color, from her kind. Her sleep had left its exquisite heaviness on eyes of the tenderest blue, and the luxuriant hair she pushed back from her face was a fleece of gold. Hers was that rare complexion that does not tan. The sun but brightened her hair and wrought the hue of health in her cheeks. Her forehead was low, broad, and white as marble; her neck and arms white, and the hands,

busied with the hair, were strong, soft, dimpled and white. The grace of her womanhood had not been overcome by the slave-labor, which she had known from infancy.

"Good morning, Deborah. Why—thy bed—have I slept under it?" she asked.

"Since the middle of the last watch," the old woman assented.

"But why? Did Merenra come?" the girl inquired anxiously.

"Nay; but I heard some one ere the camp was astir and I covered thee."

"And thou hast had no sleep since," the girl said, with regret in her voice. "Thou dost reproach me with thy goodness, Deborah."

She went to the amphora and poured water into the laver, drew forth from the box a horn comb and a vial of powdered soda from the Natron Lakes, and proceeded with her toilet.

"Came some one, of a truth?" she asked presently.

Deborah pointed to the smoking bowl. Rachel inspected the fowl.

"Marsh-hen!" she cried in surprise.

"Atsu brought it."

"Atsu?"

"Even so. From his own bounty and for Rachel," Deborah explained.

Rachel smiled.

"Thou art beset from a new direction," the old woman continued dryly, "but thou hast naught to fear from him."

"Nay; I know," Rachel murmured, arranging her dress.

The garb of the average bondwoman was of startling simplicity. It consisted of two pieces of stuff little wider than the greatest width of the wearer's body, tied by the corners over each shoulder, belted at the waist with a thong and laced together with fiber at the sides, from the hips to a point just above the knee. It was open above and below this simple seam and interfered not at all with the freedom of the wearer's movements. But Rachel's habit was a voluminous surplice, fitting closely at the neck, supplied with wide sleeves, seamed, hemmed and of ample length. Deborah was literally swathed in covering, with only her withered face and hands exposed. There was a hint of rank in their superior dress and more than a suggestion of blood in the bearing of the pair; but they were laborers with the shepherds and serving-people of Israel.

"He would wed thee, after the manner of thy people, and take thee from among Israel," Deborah continued.

The girl drooped her head over the lacing of her habit and made no answer. The old woman looked at her sharply for a moment.

"Well, eat; Rachel, eat," she urged at last. "The marsh-hen will stand thee in good stead and thou hast a weary day before thee."

Rachel looked at the old woman and made mental comparison between the ancient figure and her strong, young self. With great deliberation she divided the fowl into a large and small part.

"This," she said, extending the larger to Deborah, "is thine. Take it," waving aside the protests of the old woman, "or the first taste of it will choke me."

Deborah submitted duly and consumed the tender morsel while she watched Rachel break her fast.

"What said Atsu?" Rachel asked, after the marsh-hen was less apparent.

"Little, which is his way. But his every word was worth a harangue in weight. Merenra and his purple-wearing visitor, the spoiler, the pompous wolf, departed for Pithom last night, hastily summoned thither by a royal message. But the commander returns tomorrow at sunset. This morning, every tenth Hebrew in Pa-Ramesu is to be chosen and sent to the quarries. Atsu will send thee and me, whether we fall among the tens of a truth or not. So we get out of the city ere Merenra returns. He called the ruse a cruel one and not wholly safe, but he would sooner see thee dead than despoiled by this guest of Merenra's—or any other. I doubt not his heart breaketh for thy sake, Rachel, and he would rend himself to spare thee."

"The Lord God bless him," the girl murmured earnestly.

"Where dost thou say we go?" she asked after a little silence.

"To the quarries of Masaarah, opposite Memphis."

The color in the young Israelite's face receded a little.

"To the quarries," she repeated in a half-whisper.

"Fearest thou?"

"Nay, not for myself, at all, but we may not have another Atsu over us there. I fear for thee, Deborah."

The old woman waved her hands.

"Trouble not concerning me. I shall not die by heavy labor."

But the girl shook her head and gazed out of the low entrance of the tent. Her face was full of trouble. Once again the old woman looked at her with suspicion in her eyes. Presently the girl asked, coloring painfully:

"Was Atsu commanded to hold me for this guest of Merenra's—ah!" she broke off, "did Atsu name him?"

"Not by the titles by which the man would as lief be known," Deborah answered grimly, "but I remember he called him 'the governor.'"

There was a brief pause.

"Not so," she resumed, answering Rachel's first question. "Atsu but overheard him say to Merenra to see to it that thou wast taken from toil and made ready to journey with him to Bubastis."

"He can not take me by right save by a document of gift from the Pharaoh," Rachel protested indignantly.

"Of a truth," the old woman admitted; "but Merenra is chief commander over Pa-Ramesu and how shall thine appeal to the Pharaoh pass beyond Merenra if he see fit to humor this ravening lord with a breach of the law? The message summoning him in haste to Pithom before the order could be fulfilled was all that saved thee. And if Merenra return ere thou art safely gone, thou art of a surety undone."

Rachel moved away a little and stood thinking. The old woman went on with a note of despondency in her voice.

"Alas, Rachel! thou art in eternal peril because of thy lovely face. Beauty is a curse to a bondwoman. What I beheld in truth yesterday I have seen in

dreams—the discourteous hand put forth to seize thee and the power back of it to enforce its demand. And yet, I would not wish thee old and uncomely, for that, too, is a curse to the bondwoman," she added with a reflective shrug of the shoulders.

"If I but knew his name—" Rachel pondered aloud.

"What matter?" the old woman answered almost roughly. "Suffice it to know that he is a knave and a noble and hath evil in his heart against thee."

"Now, if I might dye my hair or stain my face—" Rachel began after a pause.

"Thou foolish child! It would not wear, nor hide thy charm at all!"

"But I dread the quarries for thee, Deborah. If only we might be hidden here, somewhere."

"Come, dost thou want to marry Atsu?" the old woman demanded harshly.

The girl turned toward her, her face flushed with resentment.

"Nay! And that thou knowest. For this very mingling with Egypt is Israel cursed. The idolatrous have reached out their hands in marriage and wedded the Hebrews away from the God of Abraham. When did an Egyptian desert his gods for the faith of the Hebrew he took in marriage? Not at any time. Therefore have we fed the shrines of the idols and increased the numbers of the idolaters and behold, the hosts of Jehovah have dwindled to naught. Therefore is He wroth with us, and justly. For are there not pitiful shrines to Ra, Ptah and Amen within the boundaries of Goshen? Nay, I wed not with an idolater," she concluded firmly.

Deborah's wrinkled face lighted and she put a tender arm about the girl.

"Of a truth, then, it is for me that thou wouldst avoid the quarries," she said. "I did but try thee, Rachel."

Rachel looked at her reproachfully, but the old woman smiled and drew her out into the open.

Without, Israel of Pa-Ramesu made ready to surrender a tenth of her number to the newest task laid on it by the Pharaoh. Quarrying was unusual labor for an Israelite and the name carried terror with it. Long had it meant heavy punishment for the malefactor and now was the Hebrew to take up its bitter life. The hard form of oppression following so closely upon the promise of liberty by Moses had diversified effects upon the camp. There was rebellion among the optimists, and the less hopeful spirits were crushed. There was the scoffer, who exasperates; the enthusiast, the over-buoyant, who could point out favorable omens even in this bitter affliction; and it could not be divined which of these troubled the people more. But whatever the individual temper, the entire camp was overhung with distress.

Israel had gathered in families before her tents—the mothers hovering their broods, the fathers tramping uneasily about them. In the heart of each, perhaps, was an indefinable conviction that he should fall among the tens. Since Israel had died in droves by hard labor in the brick-fields and along the roadways and canals, in what numbers and with what dire speed would not Israel perish in the dreaded stone-pits!

Just outside the doorway of their shelter, Deborah and Rachel overlooked the troubled camp.

"Moses comes in time," Rachel said, speaking in a low tone, "for Israel is in sore straits. The hand of the oppressor assaileth with fury his bones and his sinews now. How shall it be with him if he is bequeathed from Pharaoh to Pharaoh of an intent like unto the last three? He shall have perished from the face of the earth, for the Hebrew bends not; he breaks."

Deborah did not answer at once. Her sunken eyes were set and she seemed not to hear. But presently she spoke:

"Thou hast said. But the Hebrew droppeth out of the inheritance of the Pharaohs in thy generation, Rachel. The end of the bondage is at hand. Thou shalt see it. Of a truth Israel shall perish, if its afflictions increase for long. But they shall not continue. Have we entered Canaan as God sware unto Abraham we should? Have we possessed the gates of our enemies? Shall He stamp us out, with His promise yet unfulfilled? Behold, we have gone astray from Him, but not utterly, as all the other peoples of the earth. For centuries, amid the great clamor of prayers to the hollow gods, there arose only from this compound of slaves, here, a call to Him. Out of the reek of idolatrous savors, drifted up now and again the straight column from the altar of a Hebrew, sacrificing to the One God. Where, indeed, are any faithful, save in Israel? Shall He condemn us who only have held steadfast? Nay! He hath but permitted the oppression that we may have our fill of the glories of Egypt

and be glad to turn our backs upon her. He will cure us of idols by showing forth their helplessness when they are cried unto; and when Israel is in its most grievous strait and therefore most prone to attach itself to whosoever helpeth it, He will prove Himself at last by His power. Aye, thou hast said. Israel can suffer little more without perishing. Therefore is redemption at hand."

Rachel had turned her eyes away from the humiliation of Israel to its exaltation—from fact to prophecy. She was looking with awed face at Deborah. The prophetess went on:

"Israel hath been a green tree, carried hither in seed and grown in the wheat-fields of Mizraim. The herds and the flocks of the Pharaoh gathered under its branches and were sheltered from the sun by day and from the wolves by night. The early Pharaohs loved it, the later Pharaohs used it and the last Pharaohs feared it. For it grew exceedingly and overshadowed the wheat-fields and they said: 'It will come between us and Ra who is our god and he will bless it instead of the wheat. Let us cut it down and build us temples of its timber.' But the Lord had planted the tree in seed and in its youth it grew under the tendance of the Lord's hand. And in later years, though it lent its shadow as a grove for the idols and temples of gods, the most of it faced Heaven, and for that the Lord loves it still. The Pharaohs have lopped its branches, unmolested, but lo! now that the ax strikes at its girth, the Lord will uproot it and plant it elsewhere than in Mizraim. But the soil will not relinquish it readily, for it hath struck deep. There

shall be a gaping wound in Mizraim where it stood and all the land shall be rent with the violence of the parting."

The prophetess paused, or rather her voice died away as if she actually beheld the scene she foretold, and no more words were needed to make it plain.

Rachel's hands were clasped before her breast.

"Sayest thou these things in prophecy?" she asked finally in an eager half-whisper. Deborah's eyes seemed to awaken. She looked at Rachel a moment and answered with a nod. The girl's vision wandered slowly again toward the camp, and the sorrowful unrest of Israel subdued the inspired elation that had begun to possess her. Her face clouded once more. Deborah touched her.

"Trouble not thyself concerning these people. They go forth to labor, but their burdens shall be lightened ere long. As for thee and me—" she paused and looked up toward the eminence on which the military headquarters were built.

"As for thee and me—" Rachel urged her.

Deborah motioned in the direction she gazed.

"Come, let us make ready," she said; "they are beginning."

The Egyptian masters over Israel of Pa-Ramesu were emerging from the quarters. They were, almost uniformly, tall, slender and immature in figure. Dressed in the foot-soldier's tunic and coif, they looked like long-limbed youths compared with the powerful manhood of the sons of Abraham.

Among them, in white wool and enameled aprons, was a number of scribes, without whom the official

machinery of Egypt would have stilled in a single revolution.

The men advanced, sauntering, talking with one another idly, as if awaiting authority to proceed.

That came, presently, in the shape of an Egyptian charioteer. The vehicle was heavy, short-poled, set low on two broad wheels of six spokes, and built of hard wood, painted in wedge-shaped stripes of green and red. The end was open, the front high and curved, the side fitted with a boot of woven reeds for the ax and javelins of the warrior. Axle and pole were shod with spikes of copper and the joints were secured with tongues of bronze. The horses were bay, small, short, glossy and long of mane and tail. The harness was simple, each piece as broad as a man's arm, stamped and richly stained with many colors.

The man was an ideal soldier of Egypt. He was tall and broad-shouldered, but otherwise lean and lithe. In countenance, he was dark,—browner than most Egyptians, but with that peculiar ruddy swarthiness that is never the negro hue. His duskiness was accentuated by low and intensely black brows, and deep-set, heavy-lidded eyes. Although his features were marked by the delicacy characteristic of the Egyptian face, there was none of the Oriental affability to be found thereon. One might expect deeds of him, but never words or wit.

He wore the Egyptian smock, or kamis—of dark linen, open in front from belt to hem, disclosing a kilt or shenti of clouded enamel. His head-dress was the kerchief of linen, bound tightly across the forehead and falling with free-flowing skirts to the shoulders.

The sleeves left off at the elbow and his lower arms were clasped with bracelets of ivory and gold. His ankles were similarly adorned, and his sandals of gazelle-hide were beaded and stitched. His was a somber and barbaric presence. This was Atsu, captain of chariots and vice-commander over Pa-Ramesu.

His subordinates parted and gave him respectful path. He delivered his orders in an impassive, low-pitched monotone.

"Out with them, and mark ye, no lashes now. Leave the old and the nursing mothers."

The drivers disappeared into the narrow ways of the encampment, and Atsu, with the scribes at his wheels, drove out where the avenue of sphinxes would have led to the temple of Imhotep. Here was room for three thousand. He alighted and, with the scribes who stood, tablets in hand, awaited the coming of the Israelites.

The camp emptied its dwellers in long wavering lines. Into the open they came, slowly, and with downcast eyes, each with his remnant of a tribe. Though the columns were in order, they were ragged with many and varied statures—now a grown man, next to him a child, and then a woman. Here were the red-bearded sons of Reuben, shepherds in skins and men of great hardihood; the seafaring children of Zebulon; a handful of submissive Issachar, and some of Benjamin, Levi, and Judah.

"Do we not leave the aged behind?" the scribe asked, indicating Deborah who came with Judah.

"Give her her way," Atsu replied indifferently, and the scribe subsided.

The lines advanced, filling up the open with moody

humanity. A scribe placed himself at the head of each column, and as the hindmost Israelite emerged into the field the movement was halted.

If an eye was lifted, it shifted rapidly under the stress of desperation or suspense. If any spoke, it was the rough and indifferent, whose words fell like blows on the distressed silence. Many were visibly trembling, others had whitened beneath the tropical tan, and the wondering faces of children, who feared without understanding, turned now and again to search for their elders up and down the lines.

The drivers distributed themselves among the Israelites and each with a scribe went methodically along the files choosing every tenth.

"Get thee to my house and bring me my lists," Atsu said to the soldier who was beginning on Judah. "I will look to thy work." The man crossed his left hand to his right shoulder and hastened away.

One by one nine Israelites dropped out of line as Atsu numbered them and returned to camp. He touched the tenth.

"Name?" the scribe asked.

"Deborah," was the reply.

Meanwhile Atsu walked rapidly down the line to Rachel. The Hebrews fell out as he passed, and the relief on the faces of one or two was mingled with astonishment. He paused before the girl, hesitating. Words did not rise readily to his lips at any time; at this moment he was especially at loss.

"Thou canst abide here, in perfect security—with me," he said at last. She shook her head. "I thank thee, my good master."

"For thy sake, not mine own, I would urge thee,"

he continued with an unnatural steadiness. "Thou canst accept of me the safety of marriage. Nothing more shall I offer—or demand."

The color rushed over the girl's face, but he went on evenly.

"A part go to Silsilis, another to Syene, a third to Masaarah. If thine insulter asks concerning thy whereabouts I shall not trouble myself to remember. But what shall keep him from searching for thee—and are there any like to defend thee, if he find thee, seeing I am not there? And even if thou art securely hidden, thou hast never dreamed how heavy is the life of the stone-pits, Rachel."

"Keep Deborah here," the girl besought him, distressed. "She is old and will perish—"

"Nay, I will not send thee out alone," was the reply. "If thou goest, so must she. But—hast thou no fear?"

Once again she shook her head.

"I trust to the triumph of the good," she replied earnestly.

The sound of the scribe's approach behind him, moved him on.

"Farewell," he said as he went, and added no more, for his composure failed him.

"The grace of the Lord God attend thee," she whispered. "Farewell."

All the morning the work went on, and when the Egyptian mid-winter noon lay warm on the flat country, three hundred Israelites were ready for the long march to the Nile. They left behind them a camp oppressed with that heart-soreness, which affliction added to old afflictions brings,—the numb ache of sorrow, not its lively pain. Only Deborah, the childless,

and Rachel, the motherless, went with lighter hearts, —if hearts can be light that go forward to meet the unknown fortunes of bond-people.

As they moved out, one of the older Hebrews in the forward ranks began to sing, in a wild recitative chant, of Canaan and the freedom of Israel. The elders in the line near him took it up and every face in the long column lighted and was lifted in silent concord with the singers. Atsu in his chariot, close by, scanned his lists absorbedly, but one of the drivers hurried forward with a demand for silence. A young Hebrew, who had tramped in agitated silence just ahead, worked up into recklessness by the fervor of the singers, defied him. His voice rang clear above the song.

"Go to, thou bald-faced idolater! Israel will cease to do thy bidding one near day."

The driver forced his way into the front ranks and began to lay about him with his knout. Instantly he was cast forth by a dozen brawny arms.

"Mutiny!" he bawled.

A group of drivers reinforced him at once.

"By Bast," the foremost cried, as he came running. "The sedition of the renegade, Mesu,* bears early fruit!"

But the spirit of rebellion became contagious and the men of Israel began to throw themselves out of line. At this moment, Atsu seemed to become conscious of the riot and drove his horses between the combatants.

"Into ranks with you!" he commanded, pressing forward upon the Hebrews. The men obeyed sullenly.

*Moses.

"I have said there was to be no use of the knouts," he said sharply, turning upon the drivers. "Forward with them!"

The first driver muttered.

"What sayest thou?" Atsu demanded.

The man's mouth opened and closed, and his eyes drew up, evilly, but he made no answer.

"Forward with them," Atsu repeated, without removing his gaze from the driver.

Slowly, and now silently, the hereditary slaves of the Pharaoh moved out of Pa-Ramesu. And of all the departing numbers and of all that remained behind, none was more stricken in heart than Atsu, the stern taskmaster over Israel.

CHAPTER II

UNDER BAN OF THE RITUAL

Holy Memphis, city of Apis, habitat of Ptah!

Not idly was she called Menefer, the Good Place. Not anywhere in Egypt were the winds more gentle, the heavens more benign, the environs more august.

To the south and west of her, the Libyan hills notched the horizon. To the east the bald summits of the Arabian desert cut off the traveling sand in its march on the capital. To the north was a shimmering level that stretched unbroken to the sea. Set upon this at mid-distance, the pyramids uplifted their stupendous forms. In the afternoon they assumed the blue of the atmosphere and appeared indistinct, but in the morning the polished sides that faced the east reflected the sun's rays in dazzling sheets across the valley.

Out of a crevice between the heights to the south the broad blue Nile rolled, sweeping past one hundred and twenty stadia or sixteen miles of urban magnificence, and lost itself in the shimmering sky-line to the north.

The city was walled on the north, west, and south, and its river-front was protected by a mighty dike, built by Menes, the first king of the first dynasty in

the hour of chronological daybreak. Within were orderly squares, cross-cut by avenues and relieved from monotony by scattered mosaics of groves. Out of these shady demesnes rose the great white temples of Ptah and Apis, and the palaces of the various Memphian Pharaohs.

About these, the bazaars and residences, façade above façade, and tier upon tier, as the land sloped up to its center, shone fair and white under a cloudless sun.

Memphis was at the pinnacle of her greatness in the sixth year of the reign of the divine Meneptah. She had fortified herself and resisted the great invasion of the Rebu. Her generals had done battle with him and brought him home, chained to their chariots.

And after the festivities in celebration of her prowess, she laid down pike and falchion, bull-hide shield and helmet, and took up the chisel and brush, the spindle and loom once more.

The heavy drowsiness of a mid-winter noon had depopulated her booths and bazaars and quieted the quaint traffic of her squares. In the shadows of the city her porters drowsed, and from the continuous wall of houses blankly facing one another from either side of the streets, there came no sound. Each household sought the breezes on the balconies that galleried the inner walls of the courts, or upon the pillared and canopied housetops.

Memphis had eaten and drunk and, sheltered behind her screens, waited for the noon to pass.

Mentu, the king's sculptor, however, had not availed himself of the hour of ease. He did not labor because he must, for his house stood in the aristocratic portion

of Memphis, and it was storied, galleried, screened and topped with its breezy pavilion. Within the hollow space, formed by the right and left wings of his house, the chamber of guests to the front, and the property wall to the rear, was a court of uncommon beauty. Palm and tamarisk, acacia and rose-shrub, jasmine and purple mimosa made a multi-tinted jungle about a shadowy pool in which a white heron stood knee-deep. There were long stretches of sunlit sod, and walks of inlaid tile, seats of carved stone, and a single small obelisk, set on a circular slab, marked with measures for time—the Egyptian sun-dial. On every side were evidences of wealth and luxury.

So Mentu labored because he loved to toil. In a land languorous with tropical inertia, an enthusiastic toiler is not common. For this reason, Mentu was worth particular attention. He towered a palm in height over his Egyptian brethren, and his massive frame was entirely in keeping with his majestic stature. He was nearly fifty years of age, but no sign of the early decay of the Oriental was apparent in him. His was the characteristic refinement of feature that marks the Egyptian countenance, further accentuated by self-content and some hauteur. The idea of dignity was carried out in his dress. The kilt was not visible, for the kamis had become a robe, long-sleeved, high-necked and belted with a broad band of linen, encompassing the body twice, before it was fastened with a fibula of massive gold.

That he was an artisan noble was another peculiarity, but it was proof of exceptional merit. He had descended from a long line of royal sculptors, heightening in genius in the last three. His grandsire had

elaborated Karnak; his father had decorated the Rameseum, but Mentu had surpassed the glory of his ancestors. In the years of his youth, side by side with the great Rameses, he had planned and brought to perfection the mightiest monument to Egyptian sculpture, the rock-carved temple of Ipsambul. In recognition of this he had been given to wife a daughter of the Pharaoh and raised to a rank never before occupied by a king's sculptor. He was second only to the fan-bearers, the most powerful nobles of the realm, and at par with the murket, or royal architect, who was usually chosen from among the princes. And yet he had but come again to his own when he entered the ranks of peerage. In the long line of his ancestors he counted a king, and from that royal sire he had his stature.

He sat before a table covered with tools of his craft, rolls of papyrus, pens of reeds, pots of ink of various colors, horns of oil, molds and clay images and vessels of paint. Hanging upon pegs in the wooden walls of his work-room were saws and the heavier drills, chisels of bronze and mauls of tamarisk, suspended by thongs of deer-hide.

The sculptor, rapidly and without effort, worked out with his pen on a sheet of papyrus the detail of a frieze. Tiny profile figures, quaint borders of lotus and mystic inscriptions trailed after the swift reed in multitudinous and bewildering succession. As he worked, a young man entered the doorway from the court and, advancing a few steps toward the table, watched the development of the drawings with interest.

Those were the days of early maturity and short life.

The Egyptian of the Exodus often married at sixteen, and was full of years and ready to be gathered to Osiris at fifty-five or sixty. The great Rameses lived to the unheard-of age of seventy-seven, having occupied the throne since his eleventh year.

This young Egyptian, nearly eighteen, was grown and powerful with the might of mature manhood. A glance at the pair at once established their relationship as father and son. The features were strikingly similar, the stature the same, though the young frame was supple and light, not massive.

The hair was straight, abundant, brilliant black and cropped midway down the neck and just above the brows. There was no effort at parting. It was dressed from the crown of the head as each hair would naturally lie and was confined by a circlet of gold, the token of the royal blood of his mother's house. The complexion was the hue of a healthy tan, different, however, from the brown of exposure in that it was transparent and the red in the cheek was dusky. The face was the classic type of the race, for be it known there were two physiognomies characteristic of Egypt.

The forehead was broad, the brows long and delicately penciled, the eyes softly black, very long, the lids heavy enough to suggest serenity rather than languor. The nose was of good length, aquiline, the nostril thin and sharply chiseled. The cut of the mouth and the warmth of its color gave seriousness, sensitiveness and youthful tenderness to the face.

Egypt was seldom athletic. Though running and wrestling figured much in the pastime of youths, the nation was languid and soft. However, Seti the Elder

demanded the severest physical exercise of his sons, and Rameses II, who succeeded him, made muscle and brawn popular by example, during his reign. Here, then, was an instance of king-mimicking that was admirable.

Originally the young man had been gifted with breadth of shoulder, depth of chest, health and vigor. He would have been strong had he never vaulted a pole or run a mile. To these advantages were added the results of wise and thorough training, so wise, so thorough, that defects in the national physique had been remedied. Thus, the calves were stanch and prominent, whereas ancient Egypt was as flat-legged as the negro; the body was round and tapered with proper athletic rapidity from shoulder to heel, without any sign of the lank attenuation that was characteristic of most of his countrymen.

The suggestion of his presence was power and bigness, not the good-natured size that is hulking and awkward, but bigness that is elegant and fine-fibered and ages into magnificence.

He wore a tunic of white linen, the finely plaited skirt reaching almost to the knees. The belt was of leather, three fingers in breadth and ornamented with metal pieces, small, round and polished. His sandals were of white gazelle-hide, stitched with gold, and, by way of ornament, he had but a single armlet, and a collar, consisting of ten golden rings, depending by eyelets from a flexible band of the same material. The metal was unpolished and its lack-luster red harmonized wonderfully with the bronze throat it clasped.

Diminutive Isis in profile had emerged part-way from the background of papyrus, and the sculptor lifted

his pen to sketch in the farther shoulder as the law required. The young man leaned forward and watched. But as the addition was made, giving to the otherwise shapely little goddess an uncomfortable but thoroughly orthodox twist, he frowned slightly. After a moment's silence he came to the bench.

"Hast thou caught some great idea on the wing or hast thou the round of actual labor to perform?" he asked.

His attention thus hailed, the sculptor raised himself and answered:

"Meneptah hath a temple to Set* in mind; indeed he hath stirred up the quarries for the stone, I am told, and I am making ready, for I shall be needed."

The older a civilization, the smoother its speech. Age refines the vowels and makes the consonants suave. They spoke easily, not hastily, but as oil flows, continuously and without ripple. The younger voice was deep, soft enough to have been wooing and as musical as a chant.

"Would that the work were as probable as thou art hopeful," the young man said with a sigh.

"Out upon thee, idler!" was the warm reply. "Art thou come to vex me with thy doubts and scout thy sovereign's pious intentions?" The young man smiled.

"Hath the sun shone on architecture or sculpture since Meneptah succeeded to the throne?" he asked.

Mentu's eyes brightened wrathfully but the young man laid a soothing palm over the hand that gripped the reed.

"I do not mock thee, father. Rather am I full of

*Set—the war-god.

sympathy for thee. Thou mindest me of a war-horse, stabled, with his battle-love unsatisfied, hearing in every whimper of the wind a trumpet call. Nay, I would to Osiris that the Pharaoh's intents were permanent."

Somewhat mollified, Mentu put away the detaining hand and went on with his work. Presently the young man spoke again.

"I came to speak further of the signet," he said.

"Aye, but what signet, Kenkenes?"

"The signet of the Incomparable Pharaoh."

"What! after three years?"

"The sanctuary of the tomb is never entered and it is more than worth the journey to Tape* to search for the scarab again."

"But you would search in vain," the sculptor declared. "Rameses has reclaimed his own."

Kenkenes shifted his position and protested.

"But we made no great search for it. How may we know of a surety if it be gone?"

"Because of thy sacrilege," was the prompt and forcible reply. "Osiris with chin in hand and a look of mystification on his brow, pondering over the misdeeds of a soul! Mystification on Osiris! And with that, thou didst affront the sacred walls of the royal tomb and call it the Judgment of the Dead. Not one law of the sculptor's ritual but thou hadst broken, in the sacrilegious fresco. Gods! I marvel that the rock did not crumble under the first bite of thy chisel!"

Mentu fell to his work again. While he talked a small ape entered the room and, discovering the paint-

*Thebes.

pots, proceeded to decorate his person with a liberal hand. At this moment Kenkenes became aware of him and, by an accurately aimed lump of clay, drove the meddler out with a show of more asperity than the offense would ordinarily excite. Meanwhile the sculptor wetted his pen and, poising it over the plans, regarded his drawings with half-closed eyes. Then, as if he read his words on the papyrus he proceeded:

"Thou wast not ignorant. All thy life hast thou had the decorous laws of the ritual before thee. And there, in the holy precincts of the Incomparable Pharaoh's tomb, with the opportunity of a lifetime at hand, the skill of thy fathers in thy fingers, thou didst execute an impious whim,—an unheard-of apostasy." He broke off suddenly, changing his tone. "What if the priesthood had learned of the deed? The Hathors be praised that they did not and that no heavier punishment than the loss of the signet is ours."

"But it may have caught on thy chisel and broken from its fastening. Thou dost remember that the floor was checkered with deep black shadows."

"The hand of the insulted Pharaoh reached out of Amenti* and stripped it off my neck," Mentu replied sternly. "And consider what I and all of mine who come after me lost in that foolish act of thine. It was a token of special favor from Rameses, a mark of appreciation of mine art, and, more than all, a signet that I or mine might present to him or his successor and win royal good will thereby."

"That I know right well," Kenkenes interrupted with

*Amenti—The realm of Death.

an anxious note in his voice, "and for that reason am I possessed to go after it to Tape."

The sculptor lifted a stern face to his son and said, with emphasis: "Wilt thou further offend the gods, thou impious? It is not there, and vex me no further concerning it."

Kenkenes lifted one of his brows with an air of enforced patience, and sauntered across the room to another table similarly equipped for plan-making. But he did not concern himself with the papyrus spread thereon. Instead he dropped on the bench, and crossing his shapely feet before him, gazed straight up at the date-tree rafters and palm-leaf interbraiding of the ceiling.

Though the law of heredity is not trustworthy in the transmission of greatness, Kenkenes was the product of three generations of heroic genius. He might have developed the frequent example of decadence; he might have sustained the excellence of his fathers' gift, but he could not surpass them in the methods of their school of sculpture and its results. There was one way in which he might excel, and he was born with his feet in that path. His genius was too large for the limits of his era. Therefore he was an artistic dissenter, a reformer with noble ideals.

Mimetic art as applied to Egyptian painting and sculpture was a curious misnomer. Probably no other nation of the world at that time was so devoted to it, and certainly no other people of equal advancement of that or any other time so wilfully ignored the simplest rules of proportion, perspective and form. The sculptor's ability to suggest majesty and repose, and at the same time ignore anatomical construction,

was wonderful. To preserve the features and individual characteristics of a model and obey the rules of convention was a feat to be achieved only by an Egyptian. There was no lack of genius in him, but he had been denied liberty of execution until he knew no other forms but those his fathers followed generations before.

All Egypt was but a padding that the structural framework of religion supported. Science, art, literature, government, commerce, whatever the member, it was built upon a bone of religion. The processes and uses of sculpture were controlled by the sculptor's ritual and woe unto him who departed therefrom in depicting the gods! The deed was sacrilege.

In the portrait-forms the limits were less severely drawn. There were a dozen permissible attitudes, and the characteristic features might be represented with all fidelity; but there were boundaries that might not be overstepped. The result was an artistic perversion that well-nigh perpetrated a grotesque slander on the personal appearance of the race.

After the manner of Egyptians it was understood that Kenkenes was to follow his father's calling, and ahead of him were years of labor laid in narrow lines. If he rebelled, he incurred infinite difficulty and opposition, and yet he could not wholly submit. He had been an apt and able pupil during the long process of his instruction, but when the moment of actual practice of his art arrived, he had rebelled. His first work had been his last and, in the estimation of his father, had entailed a grievous loss. Thereafter he had been limited to copying the great sculptor's plans, the work of scribes and underlings.

Thus, he had passed three years that chafed him because of their comparative idleness and their implied rebuke. The pressure finally became too great, and he began to weigh the matter of compromise. If he could secretly satisfy his own sense of the beautiful he might follow the ritual with grace.

His cogitations, as he sat before his table, assumed form and purpose.

Presently Mentu, raising his head, noted that the shadows were falling aslant the court. With an interested but inarticulate remark, he dropped his pen among its fellows in an earthenware tray, his plans into an open chest, and went out across the court, entering an opposite door.

With his father's exit, Kenkenes shifted his position, and the expression of deep thought grew on his face. After a long interval of motionless absorption he sprang to his feet and, catching a wallet of stamped and dyed leather from the wall, spread it open on the table. Chisel, mallet, tape and knife, he put into it, and dropped wallet and all into a box near-by at the sound of the sculptor's footsteps.

The great artist reëntered in court robes of creamy linen, stiff with embroidery and gold stitching.

"Har-hat passes through Memphis to-day on his way to Tape, where he is to be installed as bearer of the king's fan on the right hand. He is at the palace, and nobles of the city go thither to wait upon him."

"The king was not long in choosing a successor to the lamented Amset," Kenkenes observed. "Har-hat vaults loftily from the nomarchship of Bubastis to an adviserships to the Pharaoh."

"Rather hath his ascent been slower than his deserts.

How had the Rebu war ended had it not been for Har-hat? He is a great warrior, hath won honor for Egypt and for Meneptah. The army would follow him into the jaws of Tuat,* and Rameses, the heir, need never take up arms, so long as Har-hat commands the legions of Egypt. But how the warrior will serve as minister is yet to be seen."

"Who succeeds him over Bubastis?"

"Merenra, another of the war-tried generals. He hath been commander over Pa-Ramesu. Atsu takes his place over the Israelites."

"Atsu?" Kenkenes mused. "I know him not."

"He is a captain of chariots, and won much distinction during the Rebu invasion. He is a native of Mendes."

Left alone, Kenkenes crossed the court to the door his father had entered and emerged later in a street dress of mantle and close-fitting coif. He took up the wallet and quitted the room. Passing through the intramural park and the chamber of guests, he entered the street. It was a narrow, featureless passage, scarcely wide enough to give room for a chariot. The brown dust had more prints of naked than of sandaled feet, for most men of the young sculptor's rank went abroad in chariots.

Once out of the passage, he turned across the city toward the east. Memphis had pushed aside her screens and shaken out her tapestries after the noon rest and was deep in commerce once again. From the low balconies overhead the Damascene carpets swung, lending festivity to the energetic traffic below. The

*Tuat—The Egyptian Hades.

pillars of stacked ware flanking the fronts of pottery shops were in a constant state of wreckage and reconstruction; the stalls of fruiterers perfumed the air with crushed and over-ripe produce; litters with dark-eyed occupants and fan-bearing attendants stood before the doorways of lapidaries and booths of stuffs; venders of images, unguents, trinkets and wines strove to outcry one another or the poulterer's squawking stall. Kenkenes met frequent obstructions and was forced to reduce his rapid pace. Curricles and chariots and wicker chairs halted him at many crossings. Carriers took up much of the narrow streets with large burdens; notaries and scribes sat cross-legged on the pavement, surrounded by their patrons and clients, and beggars and fortune-tellers strove for the young man's attention. The crowd thickened and thinned and grew again; pigeons winnowed fearlessly down to the roadway dust, and a distant yapping of dogs came down the slanting street. At times Kenkenes encountered whole troops of sacred cats that wandered about the city, monarchs over the monarch himself. By crowding into doorways he allowed these pampered felines to pass undisturbed.

In the district near the lower edge of the city he met the heavy carts of rustics, laden with cages of geese and crates of produce, moving slowly in from the wide highways of the Memphian nome. The broad backs of the oxen were gray with dust and their drivers were masked in grime.

The smell of the river became insistent. In the open stalls the fishmongers had their naked brood keeping the flies away from the stock with leafy branches. The limits of Memphis ended precipitately at a sudden

slope. In the long descent to the Nile there were few permanent structures. Half-way down were great lengths of high platform built upon acacia piling. This was the flood-tide wharf, but it was used now only by loiterers, who lay upon it to bask dog-like in the sun. The long intervening stretch between the builded city and the river was covered with boats and river-men. Fishers mending nets were grouped together, but they talked with one another as if each were a furlong away from his fellow. Freight bearers, emptying the newly-arrived vessels of cargo, staggered up toward the city. Now and again sledges laden with ponderous burdens were drawn through the sand by yokes of oxen, oftener by scores of men, on whom the drivers did not hesitate to lay the lash.

River traffic was carried on far below the flood-tide wharf. Here the long landings of solid masonry, covered with deep water four months of the year, were lined with vessels. Between yard-arms hanging aslant and over decks, glimpses of the Nile might be caught. It rippled passively between its banks, for it was yet seven months before the first showing of the June rise. Here were the frail papyrus bari, constructed like a raft and no more concave than a long bow; the huge cedar-masted cangias, flat-bottomed and slow-moving; the ancient dhow with its shapeless tent-cabin aft; the ponderous cattle barges and freight vessels built of rough-hewn logs; the light passenger skiffs; and lastly, the sumptuous pleasure-boats. These were elaborate and beautiful, painted and paneled, ornamented with garlands and sheaves of carved lotus, and spread with sails, checkered and embroidered in many colors. From these emerged processions

of parties returning from pleasure trips up the Nile. They came with much pomp and following, asserting themselves and proceeding through paths made ready for them by the obsequious laboring classes.

Presently there approached a corps of servants, bearing bundles of throw-sticks, nets, two or three fox-headed cats, bows and arrows, strings of fish and hampers of fowl. Behind, on the shoulders of four stalwart bearers, came a litter, fluttering with gay-colored hangings. Beside it walked an Egyptian of high class. Suddenly the bearers halted, and a little hand, imperious and literally aflame with jewels, beckoned Kenkenes from the shady interior of the litter.

He obeyed promptly. At another command the litter was lowered till the poles were supported in the hands of the bearers. The curtains were withdrawn, revealing the occupant—a woman.

This, to the glory of Egypt! Woman was defended, revered, exalted above her sisters of any contemporary nation. No haremic seclusion for her; no semi-contemptuous toleration of her; no austere limits laid upon her uses. She bared her face to the thronging streets; she reveled beside her brother; she worshiped with him; she admitted no subserviency to her lord beyond the pretty deference that it pleased her to pay; she governed his household and his children; she learned, she wrote, she wore the crown. She might have a successor but no supplanter; an Egyptian of the dynasties before the Persian dominance could have but one wife at a time; none but kings could be profligate, openly. So, while Babylonia led her maidens to a

market, while Ethiopia ruled hers with a rod, while Arabia numbered hers among her she-camels, Egypt gloried in national chivalry and spiritual love.

This was the sentiment of the nation, by the lips of Khu-n-Aten, the artist king:

"Sweet love fills my heart for the queen; may she ever keep the hand of the Pharaoh."

Whatever Egypt's mode of worshiping Khem and Isis, nothing could set at naught this clean, impulsive, sincere avowal.

Here, then, openly and in perfect propriety was a woman abroad with her suitor.

She might have been eighteen years old, but there was nothing girlish in her gorgeous beauty. She was a red rose, full-blown.

Her robes were a double thickness of loose-meshed white linen, with a delicate stripe of scarlet; her headdress a single swathing of scarlet gauze. She wore not one, but many kinds of jewels, and her anklets and armlets tinkled with fringes of cats and hawks in carnelian. Her hair was brilliant black and unbraided. Her complexion was transparent, and the underlying red showed deeply in the small, full-lipped mouth; like a stain in the cheeks; like a flush on the brow, and even faintly on the dainty chin. Her eyes were large and black, with the amorous lid, and lined with kohl beneath the lower lash. Her profile showed the exquisite aquiline of the pure-blooded Egyptian.

Aside from the visible evidences of charm there was an atmosphere of femininity that permeated her immediate vicinity with a witchery little short of enchant-

ment. She was the Lady Ta-meri, daughter of Amen-emhat, nomarch* of Memphis.

The Egyptian accompanying the litter was nearly thirty years of age. He was an example of the other type of the race, differing from the classic model of Kenkenes. The forehead retreated, the nose was long, low, slightly depressed at the end; the mouth, thick-lipped; the eye, narrow and almond-shaped; the cheek-bones, high; the complexion, dark brown. Still, the great ripeness of lip, aggressive whiteness of teeth and brilliance of eye made his face pleasant. He wore a shenti of yellow, over it a kamis of white linen, a kerchief bound with a yellow cord about his head, and white sandals.

He was the nephew of the king's cup-bearer, who had died without issue at Thebes during the past month. His elder brother had succeeded his father to a high office in the priesthood, but he, Nechutes, was a candidate for the honors of his dead uncle.

Kenkenes gave the man a smiling nod and bent over the lady's fingers.

"Fie!" was her greeting. "Abroad like the rabble, and carrying a burden." She filliped the wallet with a pink-stained finger-nail.

"Sit here," she commanded, patting the cushioned edge of the litter.

The sculptor declined the invitation with a smile.

"I go to try some stone," he explained.

"Truly, I believe thou lovest labor," the lady asserted accusingly. "Ah, but punishment overtakes thee

*Nomarch—governor of a civil division called a nome. A high office.

at last. Behold, thou mightst have gone with me to the marshes to-day, but I knew thou wouldst be as deep in labor as a slave. And so I took Nechutes."

Kenkenes shot an amused glance at her companion.

"I would wager my mummy, Nechutes, that this is the first intimation thou hast had that thou wert second choice," he said.

"Aye, thou hast said," Nechutes admitted, his eyes showing a sudden light. He had a voice of profound depth and resonance, that rumbled like the purring of the king's lions. "And not a moment since she swore that it was I who made her sun to move, and that Tuat itself were sweet so I were there."

"O Ma*," the lady cried, threatening him with her fan. "Thou Defender of Truth, smite him!"

Kenkenes laughed with delight.

"Nay, nay, Nechutes!" he cried. "Thou dost betray thyself. Never would Ta-meri have said anything so bald. Now, when she is moved to give me a honeyed fact, she laps it with delicate intimation, layer on layer like a lotus-bud. And only under the warm interpretation of my heart will it unfold and show the gold within."

Nechutes stifled a derisive groan, but the lady's color swept up over her face and made it like the dawn.

"Nay, now," she protested, "wherein art thou better than Nechutes, save in the manner of telling thy calumny? But, Kenkenes," she broke off, "thou art wasted in thy narrow realm. They need thy gallant tongue at court."

The young sculptor made soft eyes at her.

*Ma—The goddess of truth.

"If I were a courtier," he objected, "I must scatter my small eloquence among many beauties that I would liefer save for one."

She appropriated the compliment at once.

"Thou dost not hunger after even that opportunity," she pouted. "How long hath it been since the halls of my father's house knew thy steps? A whole moon!"

"I feared that I should find Nechutes there," Kenkenes explained.

During this pretty joust the brows of the prospective cup-bearer had knitted blackly. The scowl was unpropitious.

"Thou mayest come freely now," he growled. "The way shall be clear."

The lady looked at him in mock fear.

"Come, Nechutes," the sculptor implored laughingly, "be gracious. Being in highest favor, it behooves thee to be generous."

But the prospective cup-bearer refused to be placated. He rumbled an order to the slaves and they shouldered the litter.

Ta-meri made a pretty mouth at him, and turned again to Kenkenes.

"Nay, Kenkenes," she said. "It was mine to say that the way shall be clear—but I promise it."

She nodded a bright farewell to him, and they moved away. The sculptor, still smiling, continued down to the river.

At the landing he engaged one of the numerous small boats awaiting a passenger, and directed the clout-wearing boatman to drop down the stream.

Directly opposite his point of embarkation there were farm lands, fertile and moist, extending inland

for a mile. But presently the frontier of the desert laid down a gray and yellow dead-line over which no domestic plant might strike its root and live.

But the arable tracts were velvet green with young grain, the verdant level broken here and there by a rustic's hut, under two or three close-standing palms. Even from the surface of the Nile the checkered appearance of the country, caused by the various kinds of products, was noticeable. Egypt was the most fertile land in the world.

However, as the light bari climbed and dipped on the little waves toward the north the Arabian hills began to approach the river. Their fronts became abrupt and showed the edges of stratum on stratum of white stone. About their bases were quantities of rubble and gray dust slanting against their sides in slides and drifts. Across the narrowing strip of fertility square cavities in rows showed themselves in the white face of the cliffs. The ruins of a number of squat hovels were barely discernible over the wheat.

"Set me down near Masaarah," Kenkenes said, "and wait for me." The boatman ducked his head respectfully and made toward the eastern shore. He effected a landing at a bedding of masonry on which a wharf had once been built. The rock was now overrun with riotous marsh growth.

The quarries had not been worked for half a century. The thrifty husbandman had cultivated his narrow field within a few feet of the Nile, and the roadway that had once led from the ruined wharf toward the hills was obliterated by the grain.

Kenkenes alighted and struck through the wheat toward the pitted front of the cliffs. Before him was

a narrow gorge that debouched into the great valley over a ledge of stone three feet in height. After much winding the ravine terminated in a wide pocket, a quarter of a mile inland. Exit from this cul-de-sac was possible toward the east by a steep slope leading to the top of one of the interior ridges of the desert. Kenkenes did not pause at the cluster of houses. The roofs had fallen in and the place was quite uninhabitable. But he leaped up into the little valley and followed it to its end. There he climbed the sharp declivity and turned back in the direction he had come, along the flank of the hill that formed the north wall of the gorge. The summit of the height was far above him, and the slope was covered with limestone masses. There had been no frost nor rain to disturb the original rock-piling. Only the agencies of sand and wind had disarranged the distribution on which the builders of the earliest dynasty had looked. And this was weird, mysterious and labyrinthine.

At a spot where a great deal of broken rock encumbered the ground, Kenkenes unslung his wallet and tested the fragments with chisel and mallet. It was the same as the quarry product—magnesium limestone, white, fine, close-grained and easily worked. But it was broken in fragments too small for his purpose. Above him were fields of greater masses.

"Now, I was born under a fortunate sign," he said aloud as he scaled the hillside; "but I fear those slabs are too long for a life-sized statue."

On reaching them he found that those blocks which appeared from a distance to weigh less than a ton, were irregular cubes ten feet high.

He grumbled his disappointment and climbed upon

one to take a general survey of his stoneyard. At that moment his eyes fell on a block of proper dimensions under the very shadow of the great cube upon which he stood. It was in the path of the wind from the north and was buried half its height in sand.

Kenkenes leaped from his point of vantage with a cry of delight.

"Nay, now," he exclaimed; "where in this is divine disfavor?" He inspected his discovery, tried it for solidity of position and purity of texture. Its location was particularly favorable to secrecy.

It stood at the lower end of an aisle between great rocks. All view of it was cut off, save from that position taken by Kenkenes when he discovered it. A wall built between it and the north would bar the sand and form a nook, wholly closed on two sides and partly closed at each end by stones. All this made itself plain to the mind of the young sculptor at once. With a laugh of sheer content, he turned to retrace his steps and began to sing.

Then was the harsh desolation of the hills startled, the immediate echoes given unaccustomed sound to undulate in diminishing volume from one to another. He sang absently, but his preoccupation did not make his tones indifferent. For his voice was soft, full, organ-like, flexible, easy with illimitable lung-power and ineffable grace. When he ceased the silence fell, empty and barren, after that song's unaudienced splendor.

CHAPTER III

THE MESSENGER

Mentu returned from the session at the palace, uncommunicative and moody. When, after the evening meal, Kenkenes crossed the court to talk with him, he found the elder sculptor feeding a greedy flame in a brazier with the careful plans for the new temple to Set. Kenkenes retired noiselessly and saw his father no more that night.

The next day Mentu was bending over fresh sheets of papyrus, and when his son entered and stood beside him he raised his head defiantly.

"I have another royal obelisk to decorate," he said, fixing the young man with a steady eye, "of a surety,—without doubt,—inevitably,—for the thing is all but ready to be set up at On."

"I am glad of that," Kenkenes replied gravely. "Let me make clean copies of these which are complete."

He gathered up the sheets and took his place at the opposite table. Then ensued a long silence, broken only by the loud and restless investigations of the omnipresent and unabashed ape.

At last the elder sculptor spoke.

"The eye of heaven must be unblinkingly upon the divine Meneptah," he observed, as though he had but thought aloud.

Kenkenes gazed at his father with the inquiry on

his face that he did not voice. The sculptor had risen from his bench and was searching a chest of rolled plans near him. He caught his son's look and closed his mouth on an all but spoken expression. Kenkenes continued to gaze at him in some astonishment, and the elder man muttered to himself:

"I like him not, though if Osiris should ask me why, I could not tell. But he hath a too-ready smile, and by that I know he will twirl Meneptah like a string about his finger."

The eyes of the young man widened. "The new adviser?" he asked.

"Even so," was the emphatic reply.

Before Kenkenes could ask for further enlightenment a female slave bowed in the doorway.

"The Lady Senci sends thee greeting and would speak with thee. She is at the outer portal in her curricle," she said, addressing Mentu.

The great man sprang to his feet, glanced hurriedly at his ink-stained fingers, at his robe, and then fled across the court into the door he had entered to change his dress the day before.

Kenkenes smiled, for Mentu had been a widower these ten Nile floods.

The slave still lingered.

"Also is there a messenger for thee, master," she said, bowing again.

"So? Let him enter."

The man whom the slave ushered in a few minutes later was old, spare and bent, but he was alert and restless. His eyes were brilliant and over them arched eyebrows that were almost white. He made a jerky obeisance.

"Greeting, son of Mentu. Dost thou remember me?"

The young man looked at his visitor for a moment.

"I remember," he said at last. "Thou art Ranas, courier to Snofru, priest of On. Greeting and welcome to Memphis. Enter and be seated."

"Many thanks, but mine errand is urgent. I have been a guest of my son, who abideth just without Memphis, and this morning a messenger came to my son's door. He had been sent by Snofru to Tape, but had fallen ill on the river between On and Memphis. As it happened, the house of my son was the nearest, and thither he came, in fever and beyond traveling another rod. As the message he bore concerned the priesthood, I went to Asar-Mut and I am come from him to thee. He bids thee prepare for a journey before presenting thyself to him, at the temple."

Kenkenes frowned in some perplexity.

"His command is puzzling. Am I to become a messenger for the gods?"

"The first messenger was a nobleman," the old courier explained in a conciliatory tone, "and the holy father spoke of thy fidelity and despatch."

"Mine uncle is gracious. Salute him for me and tell him I obey."

The old man bowed once more and withdrew.

When Kenkenes crossed the court a little time later he met his father.

"The Lady Senci brings me news that makes me envious," Mentu began at once, "and shames me because of thee!"

Kenkenes lifted an expressive brow at this unexpected onslaught. "Nay, now, what have I done?"

"Nothing!" Mentu asserted emphatically; "and for that reason am I wroth. The Lady Senci's nephew, Hotep, is the new chief of the royal scribes."

"I call that good tidings," Kenkenes replied, a cheerful note in his voice, "and worth greeting with a health to Hotep. But thou must remember, my father, that he is older than I."

"How much?" the elder sculptor asked.

"Three whole revolutions of Ra."

The artist regarded his son scornfully for a moment.

"The Lady Senci wishes me to prepare plans for the further elaboration of her tomb," he went on, at last, "but the work on the obelisk may not be laid aside. If I might trust you to go on with them, the Lady Senci need not wait."

"But I have, this moment, been summoned by my holy uncle, Asar-Mut, to go on a journey, and I know not when I return," Kenkenes explained.

Mentu gazed at him without comprehending.

"A messenger on his way to Tape from Snofru was overtaken with misfortune here, and Asar-Mut, getting word of it, sent for me," the young man continued. "I can only guess that he wishes me to carry on the message."

"Humph!" the elder sculptor remarked. "Asar-Mut has kingly tastes. The couriers of priests are not usually of the nobility. But get thee gone."

The pair separated and the young man passed into the house. The ape under the bunch of leaves in a palm-top looked after him fixedly for a moment, and then sliding down the tree, disappeared among the flowers.

When, half an hour later, Kenkenes entered a cross avenue leading to a great square in which the temple stood, he found the roadway filled with people, crowding about a group of disheveled women. These were shrieking, wildly tearing their hair, beating themselves and throwing dust upon their heads. Kenkenes immediately surmised that there was something more than the usual death-wail in this.

He touched a man near him on the shoulder.

"Who may these distracted women be?" he asked.

"The mothers of Khafra and Sigur, and their women."

"Nay! Are these men dead? I knew them once.

"They are by this time. They were to be hanged in the dungeon of the house of the governor of police at this hour," the man answered with morbid relish in his tone. Kenkenes looked at him in horror.

"What had they done?" he asked. The man plunged eagerly into the narrative.

"They were tomb robbers and robbed independently of the brotherhood of thieves.* They refused to pay the customary tribute from their spoil to the chief of robbers, and whatsoever booty they got they kept, every jot of it. Innumerable mummies were found rifled of their gold and gems, and although the chief of robbers and the governor of police sought and bur-

*In ancient Egypt burglary was reduced to a system and governed by law. The chief of robbers received all the spoil and to him the victimized citizen repaired and, upon payment of a certain per cent. of the value of the object stolen, received his property again. The original burglar and the chief of robbers divided the profits. This traffic was countenanced in Egypt until the country passed into British hands.

rowed into every den in the Middle country, they could not find the missing treasure. Then they knew that the looting was not done by any of the licensed robbers. So all the professional thieves and all the police set themselves to seek out the lawless plunderers."

"Humph!" interpolated Kenkenes expressively.

"Aye. And it was not long with all these upon the scent until Khafra and Sigur were discovered coming forth from a tomb laden with spoil, and in the struggle which ensued they did murder. But the constabulary have not found the rest of the booty, though they made great search for it and may have put the thieves to torture. Who knows? They do dark things in the dungeon under the house of the governor of police."

"And so they hanged them speedily," said Kenkenes, desirous of ending the grisly tale.

"And so they hanged them. I could not get in to see, and these screaming mothers attracted me, so I am here. But my neighbor's son is a friend of the jailer, and I shall know yet how they died."

But Kenkenes was stalking off toward the temple, his shoulders lifted high with disgust.

"O, ye inscrutable Hathors," he exclaimed finally; "how ye have disposed the fortunes of four friends! Two of us hanged, a third in royal favor, a fourth an —an—an offender against the gods."

Presently the avenue opened into the temple square. With reverential hand Memphis put back her dwellings and her bazaars, that profane life might not press upon the sacred precincts of her mighty gods. Here was a vast acreage, overhung with the atmosphere of sanctity. The grove of mysteries was there, dark with profound shadow, and silent save for a lonesome bird

song or the suspirations of the wind. The great pool in its stone basin reflected a lofty canopy of sunlit foliage, and the shaggy peristyle of palm-tree trunks.

The shadow of the great structure darkened its approaches before it was clearly visible through the grove. The devotee entered a long avenue of sphinxes —fifty pairs lining a broad highway paved with polished granite flagging.

At its termination the two truncated pyramids that formed the entrance to the temple towered upward, two hundred feet of massive masonry. Egypt had dismantled a dozen mountains to build two.

When he reached the gateway that opened like a tunnel between the ponderous pylons, he was delayed some minutes waiting till the porter should admit him through the wicket of bronze. At last, a lank youth, the son of the regular keeper, appeared, and, with an inarticulate apology, bade him enter.

Within the overarching portals he was met by a novice, a priest of the lowest orders, to whom he stated his mission. With a sign to the young man to follow, the priest passed through the porch into the inner court of the temple. This was simply an immense roofless chamber. Its sides were the outer walls of the temple proper, reinforced by stupendous pilasters and elaborated with much bas-relief and many intaglios. The ends were formed by the inner pylons of the porch and outer pylons of the main temple. The latter were guarded by colossal divinities. Down the center of the court was a second aisle of sphinxes. They had entered this when the priest, with a startled exclamation, sprang behind one of the recumbent monsters in time to avoid the frolicsome salutation of an ape.

"Anubis! Mut, the Mother of Darkness, lends you her cloak! Out!" Kenkenes cried, striking at his pet. The wary animal eluded the blow and for a moment revolved about another sphinx, pursued by his master, and then fled like a phantom out of the court by the path he came. By this time the priest had emerged from his refuge and was attempting to prevent the young man's interference with the will of the ape.

"Nay, nay; I am sorry!" the priest exclaimed as Anubis disappeared. "It is an omen. Toth* visiteth Ptah; Wisdom seeketh Power! Came he by divine summons or did he seek the great god? It is a problem for the sorcerers and is of ominous import!"

"The pestiferous creature followed me unseen from the house," Kenkenes explained, rather flushed of countenance. "To me it is an omen that the idler who keeps the gate is not vigilant."

The priest shook his head and led the way without further words into the temple. Here the young sculptor was conducted through a wilderness of jacketed columns, over pavements that rang even under sandaled feet, to the center of a vast hall. The priest left him and disappeared through the all-enveloping twilight into the more sacred part of the temple.

In a moment, Asar-Mut, high priest to Ptah, appeared, approaching through the dusk. He wore the priestly habiliments of spotless linen, and, like a loose mantle, a magnificent leopard-skin, which hung by a claw over the right shoulder and, passing under the

*The ape was sacred to and an emblem of Toth, the male deity of Wisdom and Law.

left arm, was fastened at the breast by a medallion of gold and topaz. He was a typical Egyptian, but thinner of lip and severer of countenance than the laity. The wooden dolls tumbled about by the children of the realm were not more hairless than he. His high, narrow head was ghastly in its utter nakedness.

Kenkenes bent reverently before him and was greeted kindly by the pontiff.

"Hast thou guessed why I sent for thee?" he asked at once.

"I have guessed," Kenkenes replied, "but it may be wildly."

"Let us see. I would have thee carry a message for the brotherhood."

Kenkenes inclined his head.

"Good. Be thy journey as quick as thy perception. I ask thy pardon for laying the work of a temple courier upon thy shoulders, but the message is of such import that I would carry it myself were I as young and unburdened with duty as thou."

"I am thy servant, holy Father, and well pleased with the opportunity that permits me to serve the gods."

"I know, and therefore have I chosen thee. My trusted courier is dead; the others are light-minded, and Tape is in the height of festivity. They might delay—they might be lured into forgetting duty, and." the pontiff lowered his voice and drew nearer to Kenkenes, "and there are those that may be watching for this letter. A nobleman would not be thought a messenger. Thou dost incur less danger than the clout-wearing runner for the temple."

A light broke over Kenkenes.

"I understand," he said.

"Go, then, by private boat at sunset, and Ptah be with thee. Make all speed." He put a doubly wrapped scroll into Kenkenes' hands. "This is to be delivered to our holy Superior, Loi, priest of Amen. Farewell, and fail not."

Kenkenes bowed and withdrew.

It was long before sunset, and he had an unfulfilled promise in mind. He crossed the square thoughtfully and paused by the pool in its center. The surface, dark and smooth as oil, reflected his figure and face faithfully and to his evident satisfaction. He passed around the pool and walked briskly in the direction of another narrow passage lined by rich residences.

He knocked at a portal framed by a pair of huge pilasters, which towered upward, and, as pillars, formed two of the colonnade on the roof. A portress admitted him with a smile and led him through the sumptuously appointed chamber of guests into the intramural park. There she indicated a nook in an arbor of vines and left him.

With a silent foot he crossed the flowery court and entered the bower. The beautiful dweller sat in a deep chair, her little feet on a carved footstool, a silver-stringed lyre tumbled beside it. She was alone and appeared desolate. When the tall figure of the sculptor cast a shadow upon her she looked up with a little cry of delight.

"Oh," she exclaimed, "a god led thee hither to save me from the solitude. It is a moody monster not catalogued in the list of terrors." She thrust the lyre aside with her sandal and pushed the footstool, only a little, away from her.

"Sit there," she commanded. Kenkenes obeyed willingly. He drew off his coif and tossed it aside.

"Thou seest I am come in the garb of labor," he confessed.

"I see," she answered severely. "Am I no longer worthy the robe of festivity?"

"Ah, Ta-meri, thou dost wrong me," he said. "Chide me, but impugn me not. Nay, I am on my way to Tape. I was summoned hurriedly and am already dismissed upon mine errand, but I could not use myself so ill as to postpone my visit for eighteen days."

She jeered at him prettily.

"To hear thee one would think thou hadst been coming as often as Nechutes."

"How often does Nechutes come?"

"Every day."

"Of late?" he asked, with a laugh in his eyes.

"Nay," she answered sulkily. "Not since the day—that day!"

Kenkenes was silent for a moment. Then he put his elbow on the arm of her chair and leaned his head against his hand. The attitude brought him close to her.

"All these days," he said at length, "he has been unhappy among the happy and the unhappiest among the sad. He has summoned the shuddering Pantheon to hear him vow eternal unfealty to thee, Ta-meri—and lo! while they listened he begged their most potent charm to hold thee to him still. Poor Nechutes!"

"Thou dost treat it lightly," she reproached him, her eyes veiled, "but it is of serious import to—to Nechutes."

"Nay, I shall hold my tongue. I efface myself and

intercede for him, and thou dost call it exulting. And when I am fallen from thy favor there will be none to plead my cause, none to hide her misty eyes with contrite lashes."

"Mine eyes are not misty," she retorted.

"Thou hast said," he admitted, in apology. "It was not a happy term. I meant bejeweled with repentant dew."

She shook her little finger at him.

"If thou dost persist in thy calumny of me, thou mayest come to test thy dismal augury," she warned.

He dropped his eyes and his mouth drooped dolorously.

"I come for comfort, and I get Nechutes and all the unpropitious possibilities that his name suggests."

"Comfort? Thou, in trouble? Thou, the light-hearted?" she laughed.

"Nay; I am discontented, but I might as well hope to heave the skies away with my shoulders as to rebel against mine oppression. So I came to be petted into submission."

"Nay, dost thou hear him?" the lady cried. "And he came, because he was sure he would get it!"

"And he will go away because the Lady Ta-meri means he shall not have it," he exclaimed. He reached toward his coif and immediately a panic-stricken little hand stayed him.

"Nay," she said softly. "I was but retaliating. Hast thou not plagued me, and may I not tease thee a little in revenge? Say on."

"My—but now I bethink me, I ought not to tell thee. It savors of that which so offends thy nice sense of

gentility—labor," he said, sinking back in his easy attitude again.

"Fie, Kenkenes," she said. "Hath some one put thy slavish love of toil under ban? Does that oppress thee?" He reproved her with a pat on the nearest hand.

"The king toils; the priests toil; the powers of the world labor. None but the beautiful idle may be idle, and that for their beauty's sake. Nay, it is not that I may not work, but I may not work as I wish and I am heart-sick therefore."

His last words ended in a tone of genuine dejection. His eyes were fixed on the grass of the nook and his brows had knitted slightly. The expression was a rare one for his face and in its way becoming—for the moment at least. The hand he had patted drew nearer, and at last, after a little hesitancy, was laid on his black hair. He lifted his face and took cheer, from the light in her eyes, to proceed.

"Since I may speak," he began, "I shall. Ta-meri, thou knowest that as a sculptor I work within limits. The stature of mine art must crouch under the bounds of the ritual. It is not boasting if I say that I see, with brave eyes, that Egypt insults herself when she creates horrors in stone and says, 'This is my idea of art.' And these things are not human; neither are they beasts—they are grotesques that verge so near upon a semblance of living things as to be piteous. They thwart the purpose of sculpture. Why do we carve at all, if not to show how we appear to the world or the world appears to us? Now for my rebellion. I would carve as we are made; as we dispose ourselves; aye, I would display a man's soul in his face and write his

history on his brow. I would people Egypt with a host of beauty, grace and naturalness—"

"Just as if they were alive?" Ta-meri inquired with interest.

"Even so—of such naturalness that one could guess only by the hue of the stone that they did not breathe."

The lady shrugged her shoulders and laughed a little.

"But they do not carve that way," she protested. "It is not sculpture. Thou wouldst fill the land with frozen creatures—ai!" with another little shrug. "It would be haunted and spectral. Nay, give me the old forms. They are best."

Kenkenes fairly gasped with his sudden descent from earnest hope to disappointment. A flood of half-angry shame dyed his face and the wound to his sensibilities showed its effect so plainly that the beauty noted it with a sudden burst of compunction.

"Of a truth," she added, her voice grown wondrous soft, "I am full of sympathy for thee, Kenkenes. Nay, look up. I can not be happy if thou art not."

"That suffices. I am cheered," he began, but the note of sarcasm in his voice was too apparent for him to permit himself to proceed. He caught up the lyre, and drawing up a diphros—a double seat of fine woods —rested against it and began to improvise with an assumption of carelessness. Ta-meri sank back in her chair and regarded him from under dreamy lids—her senses charmed, her light heart won by his comeliness and talent. Kenkenes became conscious of her inspection, at last, and looked up at her. His eyes were still bright with his recent feeling and the hue in his cheeks a little deeper. The admiration in her face became

so speaking that he smiled and ran without pausing into one of the love-lyrics of the day. Breaking off in its midst, he dropped the lyre and said with honest apology in his voice:

"I crave thy pardon, Ta-meri. What right had I to weight thee with my cares! It was selfish, and yet—thou art so inviting a confidante, that it is not wholly my fault if I come to seek of thee, my oldest and sweetest friend, the woman comfort that was bereft me with my rightful comforter."

"Neither mother nor sister nor lady-love," she mused. He nodded, but the slight interrogative emphasis caught him, and he looked up at her. He nodded again.

"Nay, nor lady-love, thanks to the luck of Nechutes."

"Nechutes is no longer lucky," she said deliberately.

"No matter," Kenkenes insisted. "I shall be gone eighteen days, and his luck will have changed before I can return."

"Thine auguries seem to please thee," she pouted.

He put the back of her jeweled hand against his cheek.

"Nay, I but comfort thee at the sacrifice of mine own peace."

"A futile sacrifice."

"What!"

"A futile sacrifice!"

"Ah, Ta-meri, beseech the Goddess Ma to forget thy words!" he cried in mock horror. She tossed her head, and instantly he got upon his feet, catching up his coif as he did so.

"Come, bid me farewell," he said putting out his

hand, "and one of double sweetness, for I doubt me much if Nechutes will permit a welcome when I return."

"Nechutes will not interfere in mine affairs," she said, as she rose.

"Nay, I shall know if that be true when I return," he declared.

She stamped her foot.

"Fie!" he laughed. "Already do I begin to doubt it."

She turned from him and kept her face away. Kenkenes went to her and, taking both her hands in his, drew her close to him. She did not resist, but her face reproached him—not for what he was doing, but for what he had done. With his head bent, he looked down into her eyes for a moment. Her red mouth with its sulky pathos was almost irresistible. But he only pressed one hand to his lips.

"I must wait until I return," he said from the doorway, and was gone.

On the broad bosom of the Nile at sunset, four strong oarsmen were speeding him swiftly up to Thebes. Off the long wharves at the southernmost limits of the city, the rapid boat overtook and passed low-riding, slowly moving stone-barges laden with quarry slaves. The unwieldy craft progressed heavily, nearer and within the darkening shadow of the Arabian hills. Kenkenes watched them as long as they were in sight, an unwonted pity making itself felt in his heart. For even in the dusk he distinguished many women and the immature figures of children; and none knew the quarry life better than he, who was a worker in stone.

CHAPTER IV

THE PROCESSION OF AMEN

Thebes Diospolis, the hundred-gated, was in holiday attire. The great suburb to the west of the Nile had emptied her multitudes into the solemn community of the gods. Besides her own inhabitants there were thousands from the entire extent of the Thebaid and visitors even from far-away Syene and Philæ. It was an occasion for more than ordinary pomp. The great god Amen was to be taken for an outing in his ark.

Every possible manifestation of festivity had been sought after and displayed. The air was a-flutter with party-colored streamers. Garlands rioted over colossus, peristyle, obelisk and sphinx without conserving pattern or moderation. The dromos, or avenue of sphinxes, was carpeted with palm and nelumbo leaves, and copper censers as large as caldrons had been set at equidistance from one another, and an unceasing reek of aromatics drifted up from them throughout the day.

For once the magnificence of the wondrous city of the gods was set down from its usual preëminence in the eyes of the wondering spectator, and the vastness of the multitude usurped its place. The bari of Kenkenes seeking to round the island of sand lying near the eastern shore opposite the village of Karnak, met

a solid pack of boats. The young sculptor took in the situation at once, and, putting about, found a landing farther to the north. There he made a portage across the flat bar of sand to the arm of quiet water that separated the island from the eastern shore. Crossing, he dismissed his eager and excited boatmen and struck across the noon-heated valley toward the temple. The route of the pageant could be seen from afar, cleanly outlined by humanity. It extended from Karnak to Luxor and, turning in a vast loop at the Nile front, countermarched over the dromos and ended at the tremendous white-walled temple of Amen. Between the double ranks of sightseers there was but chariot room. The side Kenkenes approached sloped sharply from the dromos toward the river, and the rearmost spectators had small opportunity to behold the pageant. The multitude here was less densely packed. Kenkenes joined the crowd at this point.

Here was the canaille of Thebes.

They wore nothing but a kilt of cotton—or as often, only a cincture about the loins, and their lean bodies were blackened by the terrible sun of the desert. They were the apprentices of *paraschites*,* brewers, professional thieves, slaves and traffickers in the unclean necessities of a great city, and only their occasional riots, or such events as this, brought them into general view of the upper classes. They had nothing in common with the gentry, whom they were willing to recognize as creatures of a superior mold. Among themselves there were established castes, and members of each despised the lower and hated the upper. Ken-

*Undertakers—embalmers, an unclean class.

kenes slackened his pace when he recognized the character of these spectators, and after hesitating a moment, he hung the flat wallet containing the message around his neck inside his kamis and pushed on. Every foot of progress he essayed was snarlingly disputed until the rank of the aggressive stranger was guessed by his superior dress, when he was given a moody and ungracious path. But he finally met an immovable obstacle in the shape of a quarrel.

The stage of hostilities was sufficiently advanced to be menacing, and the young sculptor hesitated to ponder on the advisability of pressing on. While he waited, several deputies of the constabulary, methodically silencing the crowd, came upon these belligerents in turn and belabored the foremost into silence. The act decided the young man. The feelings of the rabble were now in a state sufficiently warlike to make them forget their ancient respect for class and turn savagely upon him, should he show any desire to force his way through their lines. Therefore he gave up his attempt to reach the temple and made up his mind to remain where he was. At that moment, several gorgeous litters of the belated wealthy rammed a path to the very front and were set down before the rabble. Kenkenes seized upon their advance to proceed also, and, dropping between the first and second litter, made his way with little difficulty to the front. With the complacency of a man that has rank and authority on his side he turned up the roadway and continued toward the temple. He was halted before he had proceeded ten steps. A litter richly gilded and borne by four men, came pushing through the crowd and was deposited directly in his path.

But for the unusual appearance of the bearers, Kenkenes might have passed around the conveyance and continued. Instead, he caught the contagious curiosity of the crowd and stood to marvel. The men were stalwart, black-bearded and strong of feature, and robed in no Egyptian garb. They were draped voluminously in long habits of brown linen, fringed at the hem, belted by a yellow cord with tasseled ends. The sleeves were wide and showed the wristbands of a white under-garment. The head-dress was a brown kerchief bound about the brow with a cord, also yellow.

While Kenkenes examined them in detail, a long, in-drawn breath of wonder from the circle of spectators caused him to look at the alighting owner of the litter.

He took a backward step and halted, amazed.

Before him was a woman of heroic proportions, taller, with the exception of himself, than any man in the crowd. Upon her, at first glance, was to be discerned the stamp of great age, yet she was as straight as a column and her hair was heavy and midnight-black. Hers was the Semitic cast of countenance, the features sharply chiseled, but without that aggressiveness that emphasizes the outline of a withered face. Every passing year had left its mark on her, but she had grown old not as others do. Here was flesh compromising with age—accepting its majesty, defying its decay—a sublunar assumption of immortality. There was no longer any suggestion of femininity; the idea was dread power and unearthly grace. Of such nature might the sexless archangels partake.

"Holy Amen!" one of the awed bystanders exclaimed in a whisper to his neighbor. "Who is this?"

"A princess from Punt,"* the neighbor surmised.

"A priestess from Babylon," another hazarded.

"Nay, ye are all wrong," quavered an old man who had been looking at the new-comers under the elbows of the crowd. "She is an Israelite."

"Thou hast a cataract, old man," was the scornful reply from some one near by. "She is no slave."

"Aye," went on the unsteady voice, "I know her. She was the favorite woman of Queen Neferari Thermuthis. She has not been out of the Delta where her people live since the good queen died forty years ago. She must be well-nigh a hundred years old. Aye, I should know her by her stature. It is of a truth the Lady Miriam."

At the sound of his mistress' name one of the bearers turned and shot a sharp glance at the speaker. Instantly the old man fell back, saying, as a sneer of contempt ran through the rabble at the intelligence his words conveyed: "Anger them not. They have the evil eye."

Kenkenes had guessed the nationality of the strangers immediately, but had doubted the correctness of his surmise, because of their noble mien. If he suffered any disappointment in hearing proof of their identity, it was immediately nullified by the joy his artist-soul took in the stately Hebrew woman. He forgot the mission that urged him to the temple and, permitting the shifting, restless crowd to surround him, he lingered, thinking. This proud disdain must mark

*Punt—Arabia.

his goddess of stone in the Arabian hills, this majesty and power; but there must be youth and fire in the place of this ancient calm.

A porter that stood beside him, emboldened by barley beer and the growing disapproval among the onlookers, cried:

"Ha! by the rags of my fathers, she outshines her masters, the brickmaking hag!"

Kenkenes, who towered over the ruffian, became possessed of a sudden and uncontrollable indignation. He pecked the man on the head with the knuckle of his forefinger, saying in colloquial Egyptian:

"Hold thy tongue, brawler, nor presume to flout thy betters!"

The stately Israelite, who had taken no notice of any word against her, now turned her head toward Kenkenes and slowly inspected him. He had no opportunity to guess whether her gaze was approving, for the crowd about him, grown weary of waiting, had become quarrelsome and was loudly resenting his defense of the Hebrews. The porter, supported by several of his brethren, was already menacing the young sculptor when some one shouted that the procession was in sight.

From his position Kenkenes commanded a long view of the street that declined sharply toward the river. As yet there was nothing to be seen of the pageant, but the dense crowds far down the highway swayed backward from the narrow path between them. Presently, scantily-clad runners were distinguished coming in a slow trot between the multitudes. The lane widened before the swing of their maces and there were cries of alarm as the spectators in the mid-

dle were pressed between the retreating forward ranks and the immovable rear. Running water-bearers pursued the couriers with gurglets, sprinkling the way. Directly after these, slim bare-limbed youths came in a rapid pace strewing the path with flowers and palm-leaves. By this time the intermittent sound of music had grown insistent and continuous. Solemn bodies of priests approached, series after series of the shaven, white-robed ministers of Amen. The murmur had grown to an uproar. The wild clamor of trumpet, pipe, cymbal and sistrum, with the long drone of the arghool as undertone, drifted by. The upper orders of priests followed in the vibrating wake of the musicians. Then came Loi, high-priest to the patron god of Thebes, walking alone, his ancient figure most pitifully mocked by the richness of his priestly robes.

After him the great god, Amen, in his ark.

The air was rent with acclaim. The crowd was too dense for any one to prostrate himself, but every Egyptian, potentate or slave, assumed as nearly as possible the posture of humility. Kenkenes bent reverently, but he lifted his eyes and looked long at the passing ark. Six priests bore it upon their shoulders. It was a small boat, elaborately carved, and the cabin in the center—the retreat of the deity—was picketed with a cordon of sacred images. The entire feretory was overlaid with gold and crusted with gems.

Mentu, his father, had planned one for Ptah, and a noble work it was,—quite equal to this, Kenkenes thought.

His artistic deliberations were interrupted by an angry tone in the clamor about him. The Israelites had called out a demonstration of contempt before,

and he guessed at once that they had further displeased the rabble. It was even as he had thought. The four bearers with folded arms contemplated the threatening crowd with a sidelong gaze of contempt. The stately Israelite stood in a dream, her brilliant eyes fixed in profound preoccupation on the distance. Kenkenes knew by the present attitude of the group that they had made no obeisance to Amen. Hence the mutterings among the faithful. Few had seen the offense at first, but the demonstration spread nevertheless, and assumed ominous proportions.

"Nay, now," Kenkenes thought impatiently, "such impiety is foolhardy." But he drifted into the group of Hebrews and stood between the woman of Israel and her insulters. The bearers glanced at him, at one another, and closed up beside him, but he had eyes only for the majestic Israelite. Not till he saw her bend with singular grace did he look again on the pageant, interested to know what had won her homage.

She had done obeisance before the crown prince of Egypt. He stood in a sumptuous chariot drawn by white horses and driven by a handsome charioteer. The princely person was barely visible for the pair of feather fans borne by attendants that walked beside him. Through continuous cheering he passed on. Seti, the younger, followed, driving alone. His eyes wandered in pleased wonder over the multitude which howled itself hoarse for him.

Close behind him was a chariot of ebony drawn by two plunging, coal-black horses. A robust Egyptian, who shifted from one foot to the other and talked to his horses continually, drove therein alone. As he approached, the Hebrew woman raised herself so sud-

denly that one of the nervous animals side-stepped, affrighted. The swaggering Egyptian, with a muttered curse, struck at her with his whip. The four bearers sprang forward, but she quieted them with a few words in Hebrew. Reëntering her litter she was borne away, while the Thebans were still lost in the delights of the procession.

In the few strange words of the woman of Israel, Kenkenes had caught the name of Har-hat. This then was the bearer of the king's fan—this insulter of age and womanhood. And the words of Mentu seemed very fitting,—"I like him not."

The Thebans were in raptures. The splendors of the pageant had far surpassed their expectations. Priests, soldiers and officials came in companies, rank upon rank, of exalted and ornate dignity. Chariots and horses shone with gilding, polished metal and gay housings, while the marching legions clanked with pike and blade and shield. Now that the chief luminaries of the procession had passed, the rich and lofty departed with a great show of indifference to the rest of the parade. But the humbler folk, all unlearned in the art of assumption, had not reached that nice point of culture, and lingered to see the last foot-soldier pass.

Kenkenes, urged by his mission, was departing with the rich and lofty, when his attention was attracted by the chief leading the section of royal scribes now passing. His was a compact, plump figure, amply robed in sheeny linen, and he balanced himself skilfully in his light shell of a chariot, which bumped over the uneven pavement. He was not a brilliant mark in the long parade, but something other than his mere

appearance made him conspicuous. Behind him, walking at a respectful distance, was his corps of subordinates—all mature, many of them aged, but the years of their chief were fewer than those of the youngest among them. From the center of the crowd his face appeared boyish, and the multitude hailed him with delight. But the crown prince himself was not more unmoved by their acclaim. His silent dignity, misunderstood, brought forth howls of genuine pleasure, and groups of young noblemen, out of the great college of Seti I, saluted him by name, adding thereto exalted titles in good-natured derision.

"Hotep!" ejaculated Kenkenes aloud, catching the name from the lips of the students. "By Apis, he is the royal scribe!"

Not until then had he realized the extent of his friend's exaltation.

He turned again toward the temple, walking between the crowds and the marching soldiers, indifferent to the shouts of the spectators—lost in contemplation. But the procession moved more swiftly than he and the last rank passed him with half his journey yet to complete. Instantly the vast throng poured out into the way behind the rearmost soldier and swallowed up the sculptor in a shifting multitude. For an hour he was hurried and halted and pushed, progressing little and moving much. Before he could extricate himself, the runners preceding the pageant returning the great god to his shrine, beat the multitude back from the dromos and once again Kenkenes was imprisoned by the hosts. And once again after the procession had passed, he did fruitless battle with a tossing human sea. But when the street

had become freer, he stood before the closed portal of the great temple. The solemn porter scrutinized the young sculptor sharply, but the display of the linen-wrapped roll was an efficient passport. In a little space he was conducted across the ringing pavements, under the vaulted shadows, into the presence of Loi, high priest to Amen.

The ancient prelate had just returned from installing the god in his shrine and was yet invested in his sacerdotal robes. At one time this splendid raiment had swathed an imposing figure, but now the frame was bowed, its whilom comfortable padding fallen away, its parchment-like skin folded and wrinkled and brown. He was trembling with the long fatigue of the spectacle.

He spelled the hieratic writings upon the outer covering of the roll which the young man presented to him, and asked with some eagerness in his voice:

"Hast thou traveled with all speed?"

"Scarce eight days have I been on the way. Only have I been delayed a few hours by the crowds of the festival."

"It is well," replied the pontiff. "Wait here while I see what says my brother at On."

He motioned Kenkenes to a seat of inlaid ebony and retired into a curtained recess.

The apartment into which Kenkenes had been conducted was small. It was evidently the study of Loi, for there was a small library of papyri in cases against the wall; a deep fauteuil was before a heavy table covered with loosely rolled writings. The light from a high slit under the architrave sifted down on the floor strewn with carpets of Damascene weave. Two

great pillars, closely set, supported the ceiling. They were of red and black granite, and each was surmounted by a foliated encarpus of white marble. The ceiling was a marvelous marquetry of many and wondrously harmonious colors.

In one wall was the entrance leading to another chamber. It was screened by a slowly swaying curtain of broidered linen, which was tied at its upper corners to brass rings sunk in the stone frame of the door. This frame attracted the attention of the young sculptor. It consisted of two caryatides standing out from the square shaft from which they were carved, their erect heads barely touching the ceiling. The figures were of heroic size and wore the repose and dignity of countenance characteristic of Egyptian statues. The sculptor had been so successful in bringing out this expression that Kenkenes stood before them and groaned because he had not followed nature to the exquisite achievement he might have attained.

He was deeply interested in his critical examination of the figures when the old priest darted into the apartment, his withered face working with excitement.

"Go! Go!" he cried. "Eat and prepare to return to Memphis with all speed. Thine answer will await thee here to-night at the end of the first watch,—and Set be upon thee if thou delayest!"

Kenkenes, startled out of speech, did obeisance and hastened from the temple.

The outside air was thick with dust and intensely hot under the reddening glare of the sun. It was late afternoon. The city was still crowded, the river front lined with a dense jam of people awaiting transporta-

tion to the opposite shore. Kenkenes knew that many would still be there on the morrow, since the number of boats was inadequate to carry the multitude of passengers.

He began to think with concern upon the security of his own bari, left in the marsh-growth by the Nile side, north of Karnak. He left the shifting crowd behind and struck across the sandy flat toward the arm of quiet water. Straggling groups preceded and followed him and at the Nile-side he came upon a number contending for the possession of his boat. They were image-makers and curriers, equally matched against one another, and a Nubian servitor in a striped tunic, who remained neutral that he might with safety join the winning party. The appearance of the nobleman checked hostilities and the contestants, recognizing the paternalism of rank after the manner of the lowly, called upon him to arbitrate.

"The boat is mine, children,"* was his quiet answer. He pushed it off, stepped into it, and turned it broadside to them.

"See here, the scarab of Ptah," he said, tapping the bow with a paddle, "and the name of Memphis?" With that he drew away to the sandbar before the astonished men had realized the turn of events. Then they looked at one another in silence or muttered their disgust; but the Nubian went into transports of rage, making such violent demonstrations that the image-makers and curriers turned on him and bade him cease.

At the Libyan shore Kenkenes gave his bari into

* The oriental master calls his servants "children."

the hands of a river-man and by a liberal fee purchased its security from confiscation. Then he turned his face toward the center of the western suburb of Thebes Diospolis. He had the larger palace of Rameses II in view and he walked briskly, as one who goes forward to meet pleasure. Only once, when he passed the palace and temple of the Incomparable Pharaoh, which stood at the mouth of the Valley of the Kings, he frowned in discontent. Far up the tortuous windings of this gorge was the tomb of the great Rameses and there had the precious signet been lost. As he looked at the high red ridge through which this crevice led, he remembered his father's emphatic prohibition and bit his lip. Thereafter, throughout a great part of his walk, he railed mentally against the useless loss of a most propitious opportunity.

To the first resplendent member of the retinue at Meneptah's palace, who cast one glance at the fillet the sculptor wore, and bent suavely before him, Kenkenes stated his mission. The retainer bowed again and called a rosy page hiding in the dusk of the corridor.

"Go thou to the apartments of my Lord Hotep and tell him a visitor awaits him in his chamber of guests."

The lad slipped away and the retainer led Kenkenes into a long chamber near the end of the corridor. The hall had been darkened to keep out the glare of the day, air being admitted only through a slatted blind against which a shrub in the court outside beat its waxen leaves. Before his eyes had become accustomed to the dusk Kenkenes heard footsteps coming down the outer passage, with now and then the light

and brisk scrape of the sandal toe on the polished floor. The young sculptor smiled at the excited throb of his heart. The new-comer entered the hall and drew up the shutter. The brilliant flood of light revealed to him the tall figure of the sculptor rising from his chair—to the sculptor the trim presence of the royal scribe.

The friends had not met in six years.

For a space long enough for recognition to dawn upon the scribe, he stood motionless and then with an exclamation of extravagant delight he seized his friend and embraced him with woman-like emotion.

CHAPTER V

THE HEIR TO THE THRONE

Loi was not present at the sunset prayers in Karnak. An hour before he had summoned the trustiest priest in the brotherhood of ministers to Amen and bade him conduct the ceremonies of the evening. Then he sent to the temple stores, put into service another boat and was ferried over to the Libyan suburb of Thebes. He had himself borne in a litter to the greater palace of Rameses II, and asked an audience with Meneptah.

The king was at prayers in the temple of his father, close to the palace, and the dusk of twilight was settling on the valley of the Nile, before Loi was summoned to the council chamber.

The hall he entered was vast and full of deep shadows. The two windows set in one wall, many feet above the floor, showed two spaces of darkening sky. A single torch of aromatics flared and hissed beside the throne dais. Tremendous wainscoting covered the base of the walls, more than a foot above a man's height. It was massively carved with colossal sheaves of lotus-blooms and sword-like palm-leaves. Columns of great girth, bouquets of conventional stamens, ending in

foliated capitals, supported by the lofty ceiling. The few men gathered in council were surrounded, overshadowed, and dwarfed by monumental strength and solemnity.

Behind a solid panel of carved cedar, which hedged the royal dais, stood Meneptah. Above his head were the intricate drapings of a canopy of gold tissue. On a level with his eyes, at his side, was the single torch. His vision, like his father's, was defective. He was forty years old, but appeared to be younger. His person was plump, and in stature he was shorter than the average Egyptian. His coloring was high and of uniform tint. The arch of the brow, and the conspicuous distance between it and the eye below, the disdainful tension of the nostril and the drooping corners of the mouth, gave his face the injured expression of a spoiled child. The lips were of similar fullness and the chin retreated. There was refinement in his face, but no force nor modicum of perception.

Below, with the light of the torch wavering up and down his robust figure, was Har-hat, Meneptah's greatest general and now the new fan-bearer. In repose his face was expressive of great good-humor. Merriment lighted his eyes and the cut of his mouth was for laughter. But the smile seemed to be set and, furthermore, indicated that the fan-bearer found much mirth in the discomfiture of others. Aside from this undefined atmosphere of heartlessness, it can not be said that there was any craft or wickedness patent on his face, for his features were good and indicative of unusual intelligence. To the unobservant, he seemed

to be a lovable, useful, able man. However, we have seen what Mentu thought of him, and Mentu's estimation might have represented that of all profound thinkers. But to the latter class, most assuredly, Meneptah did not belong.

Har-hat, taking the place of the king during the Rebu war, had displayed such generalship that the Pharaoh had rewarded him at the first opportunity with the highest office, except the regency, at his command.

To the king's right, beside the dais, with a hand resting on the back of a cathedra, or great chair, was the crown prince, Rameses. The old courtiers of the dead grandsire, visiting the court of Meneptah, flung up their hands and gasped when they beheld the heir to the double crown of Egypt. They looked upon the old Pharaoh, renewed in youth and strength. There were the same narrow temples with the sloping brow, the same hawked nose, the same full lips, the same heavy eye with the smoldering ember in its dusky depths. The only radical dissimilarity was the hue of the prince's complexion. It was a strange, un-Egyptian pallor, an opaque whiteness with dark shadows that belied the testimony of vigor in his sinewy frame.

The old courtiers that were still attached to the court of Meneptah watched with fascination the development of the heir's character. He was twenty-two years old now and had proved that no alien nature had been housed in the old Pharaoh's shape. If any pointed out the prince's indolence as proving him unlike his grandsire the old courtiers shook their heads and said: "He does not reign as yet and he but saves

his forces till the crown is his." So Egypt, stagnated at the pinnacle of power by the accession of Meneptah, began to look forward secretly to the reign of Rameses the Younger, with a hope that was half terror.

To-night he stood in semi-dusk robed in festal attire, for somewhere a rout awaited him. And of the groups of power and rank about him, none seemed to fit that majestic council chamber so well as he. It was not the robe of costly stuffs he wore, nor the trappings of jewels, which if he moved never so slightly emitted a shower of frosty sparks—but a peculiar emanation of magnetism that at once repelled and attracted, and made him master over the monarch himself. He had never met repulse or defeat; he had never entered the presence of his peer; he had never loved, he had never prayed. He was a solitary power, who admitted death as his only equal, and defied even him.

The other counselors were minor members of the cabinet, who had been summoned, but expected only to hear and keep silence while the great powers—the king, the prince, the priest and the fan-bearer—conferred.

Loi entered, bowing and walking with palsied step. At one time the three central figures of the hall had been his pupils. He had taught them from the simplest hieratic catechism to the initiation into the mysteries. As novices they had kissed his hand and borne him reverence. Now as the initiated, exalted through the acquisition of power, it lay with them to reverse conditions if they pleased. But as the old prelate prepared to do obeisance before Meneptah, he was stayed with a gesture, and after a word of greeting

was dismissed to his place. Rameses saluted him with a motion of his hand and Har-hat bowed reverently. The pontiff backed away to the great council table set opposite the throne and was met there by a courtier with a chair.

At a sign from the king, who had already sunk into his throne, the old man sat.

"Thou bringest us tidings, holy Father?"

"Even so, O Son of Ptah."

"Say on."

The priest moved a little uncomfortably and glanced at the ministers grouped in the shadows.

"Save for the worthy Har-hat and our prince, O my King, thou hast no need of great council," he said.

Meneptah raised his hand and the supernumerary ministers left the chamber. When they were gone, Loi unwrapped the roll Kenkenes had brought and began to read:

"To Loi, the most high Servant of Amen, Lord of Tape, the Servant of Ra, at On, sends greeting:

"The gods lend me composure to speak calmly with thee, O Brother. And let the dismay which is mine explain the lack of ceremony in this writing.

"It is not likely that thou hast forgotten the good Queen Neferari Thermuthis' foster-son—the Hebrew Mesu, whom she found adrift in a basket on Nilus. But lest the years have driven the memory of his misdeeds from thy mind, I tell again the story. Thou knowest he was initiated a priest of Isis, and scarce had the last of the mysteries been disclosed to him, ere it was seen that the brotherhood had taken an apostate unto itself.

"By the grace of the gods, he interfered in a brawl

at Pithom and killed an Egyptian. Before he could be taken he fled into Midian, and the secrets of our order were safe, for a time.

"One by one our fellows have entered Osiris. The young who knew not have filled their places. Thou and I, only, are left—and the Hebrew!

"He hath returned!

"The gods make strong our hands against him! He went away as a menace, but he returneth as a pestilence. The demons of Amenti are with him, and his hour is most propitious. He hath sunk himself in the Israelitish pool here in the north, and he will breathe therefrom such vapors as may destroy Egypt —faith—state—all!

"The bond-people are already in ferment. There was mutiny at Pa-Ramesu recently, when three hundred were chosen to work the quarries. Moreover, the taskmasters are corrupt. The commander, one Atsu by name, appointed when the chief Merenra became nomarch over Bubastis, hath disarmed the underdrivers, removed the women from toil and restored many privileges which are ruinous to law and order. The whole Delta is in commotion. The nomad tribes near the Goshen country are agitated; communities of Egyptian shepherds have been won over to the Hebrew's cause, and now the Israelitish renegade needs but to betray the secrets to bring such calamity upon Egypt as never befell a nation.

"But, Brother, he is within reach of an avenging hand! Commission us, I pray thee, to protect the mysteries after any manner that to us seemeth good.

"Despatch is urgent. He may fly again. Give us thine answer as we have sent this to thee—by a noble-

man—a swift and trusty one, and the blessings of the Radiant Three be upon thy head.

"Thy servant, the Servant of Ra,

"Snofru."

When the priest finished, the king was sitting upright, his face flushed with feeling.

"Sedition!" he exclaimed; "organized rebellion in the very heart of my realm!"

He paused for a space and thrust back the heavy fringes of his cowl with a gesture of peevish impatience.

"What evil humor possesses Egypt?" he burst forth irritably. "Hardly have I overthrown an invader before my people break out. I quiet them in one place and they revolt in another. Must I turn a spear upon mine own?"

"Well," he cried, stamping his foot, when the three before him kept silence, "have ye no word to say?"

His eyes rested on Har-hat, with an imperious expectation in them. The fan-bearer bent low before he answered.

"With thy gracious permission, O Son of Ptah," he said, "I would suggest that it were wise to cool an insurrection in the simmering. The disaffection seems to be of great extent. But the Rameside army assembled on the ground might check an open insurrection. Furthermore, thou hast seen the salutary effect of thy visit to Tape when she forgot her duty to her sovereign. Thy presence in the Delta would undoubtedly expedite the suppression of the rebellion likewise."

"O, aye," Meneptah declared. "I must go to Tanis. It seems that I must hasten hither and thither over

Egypt pursuing sedition like a scent-hunting jackal. Mayhap if I were divided like Osiris* and a bit of me scattered in each nome, I might preserve peace. But it goes sore against me to drag the army with me. Hast thou any simpler plan to offer, holy Father?"

The old priest shifted a little before he answered.

"The mysteries of the faith are in possession of Mesu," he began at last. "The writing saith he hath exerted great influence over the bond-people—in truth he hath entered a peaceful land and stirred it up—and time is but needed to bring the unrest to open warfare. Thou, O Meneptah, and thou, O Rameses, and thou, O Har-hat, each being of the brotherhood—ye know that we hold the faith by scant tenure in the respect of the people. Ye know the perversity of humanity. Obedience and piety are not in them. Though they never knew a faith save the faith of their fathers, we must pursue them with a gad, tickle them with processions and awe them with manifestations. So if it were to come over the spirit of this Hebrew to betray the mysteries, to scout the faith and overturn the gods, he would have rabble Egypt following at his heels.

"As the writing saith, he hath the destruction of the state in mind, and his own aggrandizement. He but beginneth on the faith because he seeth in that a rift wherein to put the lever that shall pry the whole state asunder. So with two and a half millions of Hebrews and a horde of renegade Egyptians to combat, I fear the Rameside army might spill more good blood than

*Osiris—the great god of Egypt, was overcome by Set, his body divided and scattered over the valley of the Nile. Isis, wife of Osiris, gathered up the remains and buried them at This or Abydos.

is worth wasting on a mongrel multitude. The rabble without a leader is harmless. Cut off the head of the monster, and there is neither might nor danger in the trunk. Put away Mesu, and the insurrection will subside utterly."

The priest paused and Meneptah stroked the polished coping of the panel before him with a nervous hand. There was complete silence for a moment, broken at last by the king.

"Mesu, though a Hebrew, an infidel and a malefactor, is a prince of the realm, my foster-brother—Neferari's favorite son. I can not rid myself of him on provocation as yet misty and indirect."

"Nay," he added after another pause, "he shall not die by hand of mine." The prelate raised his head and met the eyes of the king. After he read what lay therein, the dissatisfaction that had begun to show on his ancient face faded.

The Pharaoh settled back into his seat and his brow cleared as if the problem had been settled. But suddenly he sat up.

"What have I profited by this council? Shall I take the army or leave it distributed over Egypt?" he stopped abruptly and turned to the crown prince. "Help us, my Rameses," he said in a softer tone. "We had well-nigh forgotten thee."

Rameses raised himself from the back of his cathedra, against which he lounged, and moved a step forward.

"A word, my father," he said calmly. "Thy perplexity hath not been untangled for thee, nor even a thread pulled which shall start it raveling. The priesthood can kill Mesu," he said to Loi, "and it will

do them no hurt. And thou, my father, canst countenance it and seem no worse than any other monarch that loved his throne. Thus ye will decapitate the monster. But there be creatures in the desert which, losing one head, grow another. Mesu is not of such exalted or supernatural villainy that they can not fill his place. Wilt thou execute Israel one by one as it raises up a leader against thee? Nay; and wilt thou play the barbarian and put two and a half million at once to the sword?"

The trio looked uncomfortable, none more so than the Pharaoh. The prince went on mercilessly.

"Are the Hebrews warriors? Wouldst thou go against a host of trowel-wielding slaves with an army that levels lances only against free-born men? And yet, wilt thou wait till all Israel shall crowd into thy presence and defy thee before thou actest? And again, wilt thou descend on them with arms now when they may with justice cry 'What have we done to thee?' Thou art beset, my father."

The Pharaoh opened his lips as if to answer, but the level eye of the prince silenced him.

"Thou hast not fathomed the Hebrew's capabilities, my father," Rameses continued. "In him is a wealth, a power, a magnificence that thy fathers and mine built up for thee, and the time is ripe for the garnering of thy profit. What monarch of the sister nations hath two and a half millions of hereditary slaves—not tributary folk nor prisoners of war—but slaves that are his as his cattle and his flocks are his? What monarch before thee had them? None anywhere, at any time. Thou art rich in bond-people beyond any monarch since the gods reigned."

The chagrin died on the Pharaoh's face and he wore an expectant look. The prince continued in even tones.

"By use, they have fitted themselves to the limits laid upon them by the great Rameses. The feeble have died and the frames of the sturdy have become like brass. They have bred like beetles in the Nile mud for numbers. Ignorant of their value, thou hast been indifferent to their existence. Forgetting them was pampering them. They have lived on the bounty of Egypt for four hundred years and, save for the wise inflictions of a year or two by the older Pharaohs, they have flourished unmolested. How they repay thee, thou seest by this writing. Now, by the gods, turn the face of a master upon them. Remove the soft driver, Atsu, and put one in his stead who is worthy the office. Tickle them to alacrity and obedience with the lash—yoke them—load them—fill thy canals, thy quarries, thy mines with them—" He broke off and moved forward a step squarely facing the Pharaoh.

"Thou hast thine artist—that demi-god Mentu, in whom there is supernatural genius for architecture as well as sculpture. Make him thy murket* as well, and with him dost thou know what thou canst do with these slaves? Thou canst rear Karnak in every herdsman's village; thou canst carve the twin of Ipsambul in every rock-front that faces the Nile; thou canst erect a pyramid tomb for thee that shall make an infant of Khufu; thou canst build a

*Murket—the royal architect, an exalted office usually held by princes of the realm.

highway from Syene to Tanis and line it with sisters of the Sphinx; thou canst write the name of Meneptah above every other name on the world's monuments and it shall endure as long as stone and bronze shall last and tradition go on from lip to lip!"

The prince paused abruptly. Meneptah was on his feet, almost in tears at the contemplation of his pictured greatness.

"Mark ye!" the prince began again. His arm shot out and fell and the flash of its jewels made it look like a bolt of lightning. "I would not fall heir to Israel—and if these things are done in thy lifetime I must build my monuments with prisoners of war!"

The old hierarch, who had been nervously rubbing the arm of his chair during the last of the prince's speech, broke the dead silence with an awed whisper.

"Ah, then spake the Incomparable Pharaoh!"

Meneptah put out his hand, smiling.

"No more. The way is shown. I follow, O my Rameses!"

CHAPTER VI

THE LADY MIRIAM

Meanwhile the scribe of the "double house of life," and the son of the royal sculptor were taking comfort on the palace-top beneath the subdued light of a hooded lamp.

The pair had spoken of all Memphis and its gossip; had given account of themselves and had caught up with the present time in the succession of events.

"Hotep, at thy lofty notch of favor, one must have the wisdom of Toth," Kenkenes observed, adding with a laugh, "mark thou, I have compared thee with no mortal."

Hotep shook his head.

"Nay, any man may fill my position so he but knows when to hold his tongue and what to say when he wags it."

"O, aye," the sculptor admitted in good-natured irony. "Those be simple qualifications and easy to combine."

The scribe smiled.

"Mine is no arduous labor now. During my years of apprenticeship I was sorely put to it, but now I have only to wait upon the king and look to it that mine underlings are not idle. If another war should come—if any manner of difficulty should arise in matters of state, I doubt not mine would be a heavy lot."

The young man spoke of war and fellowship with a monarch as if he had been a lady's page and gossiped of fans and new perfumes.

Kenkenes looked at him with a full realization of the incongruity of the youth of the man and the weight of the office that was his.

But at close range the scribe's face was young only in feature and tint. He was born of an Egyptian and a Danaid, and the blond alien mother had impressed her own characteristics very strongly on her son.

He had a plump figure with handsome curves, waving, chestnut hair and a fair complexion. Nose and forehead were in line. The eyes were of that type of gray that varies in shade with the mental state. His temper displayed itself only in their sudden hardening into the hue of steel; content and happiness made them blue. They were always steady and comprehending, so that whoever entered his presence for the first time said to himself: "Here is a man that discovers my very soul."

Whatever other blunder Meneptah might have made, he had redeemed himself in the wisdom he displayed in choosing his scribe. Kenkenes had been led to ask how Hotep had come to his place.

"My superior, Pinem, died without a son," the scribe had explained; "and as my record was clean, and the princes had ever been my patrons, the Pharaoh exalted me to the scribeship."

Kenkenes had then set down a mark in favor of the princes.

"I doubt not," the scribe observed at last, "that my time of ease is short-lived."

The sculptor looked at him with inquiry in his eyes.

"When sedition arises and defies the Pharaoh in his audience chamber," Hotep went on, "it has reached the stage of a single alternative—success or death. Dost know the Lady Miriam?"

"The Israelite?"

"Even so."

"I saw her this day."

"Good. Now, look upon the scene. Thou knowest she is the sister of Prince Mesu, and the favorite waiting-woman of the good Queen Thermuthis. She has lived in obscurity for forty years, but this morning she swept into the audience chamber, did majestic obeisance and besought a word 'with him who was an infant in her maturity,' she said. The council chamber was filled with those gathered to welcome Har-hat. Meneptah bade her speak. Hast thou ever heard an Israelitish harangue?" he broke off suddenly.

Kenkenes shook his head.

"Ah, theirs is pristine oratory—occult eloquence," the scribe said earnestly, "and she is mistress of the art. She told the history of Israel and catalogued its wrongs in a manner that lacked only measure and music to make it a song. But, Kenkenes, she did not move us to compunction and pity. When she had done, we had not looked on a picture of suffering and oppression, but of insulted pride and rebellion. Instead of compunction, she awakened admiration, instead of pity, respect. For the moment she represented, not a multitude of complaining slaves, but a race of indignant peers.

"Meneptah—ah! the good king," the scribe went on, "was impressed like the rest of us. But finally he showed her that the Israelites were what they were

by the consent of the gods; that their unwillingness but increased the burden. He pointed out the example of his illustrious sires as justification for his course; enumerated some of their privileges,—the fertile country given them by Egypt, and the freedom that was theirs to worship their own God,—and summarily refused to indulge them further.

"Then she became ominous. She bade him have a care for the welfare of Egypt before he refused her. Her words were dark and full of evil portent. The air seemed to winnow with bat-wings and to reek with vapors from witch-potions and murmur with mystic formulas. Every man of us crept, and drew near to his neighbor. When she paused for an answer, the king hesitated. She had menaced Egypt and it stirreth the heart of the father when the child is threatened. He turned to Har-hat in his perplexity and craved his counsel. The fan-bearer laughed good-naturedly and begged the Pharaoh's permission to send her to the mines before she bewitched his cattle and troubled him with visions. Har-hat's unconcern made men of us all once more, but Meneptah shook his head. 'The name of Neferari Thermuthis defends her,' he said; 'let her go hence'."

"'And I take no amelioration to my people?' she demanded. 'Nay,' he replied, 'not in the smallest part shall their labor be lessened.'

"Holy Isis, thou shouldst have seen her then, Kenkenes!

"She approached the very dais of the throne and, throwing up her arms, flung her defiance into the face of her sovereign. It were treason to utter her words again. I have seen men white and shaking from rage,

but Meneptah never hath so much of temper to display. Far be it from me to say that the king was afraid, but I tell you, Kenkenes, mine own hair is not yet content to lie flat. She concentrated all the denunciatory bitterness of the tongue and pronounced and gloried in the doom of the dynasty, heaping the blame of its destruction upon the head of Meneptah!"

The scribe finished his story in a whisper. Kenkenes was by this time sitting up, his eyes shining with interest and wonder.

"Gods! Hotep, thou dost make me creep."

"Creep!" the scribe responded heartily, "never in my life have I so wanted to flee a royal audience. When she had done, she turned and swept from the presence and no man lifted a finger to stay her."

For a moment there was an expressive silence between the two young men. At last Kenkenes broke it in a voice of intense admiration.

"What an intrepid spirit! Small wonder that she did not heed the condemnation of the rabble at midday—she who was fresh from a triumph over the Pharaoh!"

Hotep's eyes widened warningly and he shook his head.

"Nay, hush me not, Hotep," Kenkenes went on in a reckless whisper. "I must say it. Would to the gods I had been there to copy it in stone!"

"Hush! babbler!" the scribe exclaimed, his eyes twinkling nevertheless, "thine art will make an untimely mummy of thee yet."

Kenkenes poured out his first glass of wine and set it down untasted. The contemplated sacrilege in stone opposite Memphis confronted him.

"If Egypt's lack of art does not kill me first," he added in defense.

"Nay," Hotep protested, "why wouldst thou perpetuate the affront to the Pharaoh?"

"Because it is history and a better delineation of the Israelitish character than all the wordy chronicles of the historians could depict," was the spirited reply.

"But the ritual," Hotep began, with the assurance of a man that feels he is armed with unanswerable argument.

"Sing me no song of the ritual," Kenkenes broke in impatiently. "The ritual offends mine ears—my sight, my sense. We have quarreled beyond any treaty-making—ever."

The other looked at him with amazement and much consternation.

"Art thou mad?" he exclaimed.

"Nay, but I am rebellious—as rebellious as the Israelite, for I have already shaken my fist in the face of the sculptor's canons. And the time will come when the world will call my revolt just. I would there were a chronicler, here, now, to write me down, since I would be remembered as the pioneer. I shall win no justification, in these days, perhaps only persecution, but I would reap my reward of honor, though it be a thousand years in coming."

"Thou hast a grudge against the conventional forms and the rules of the ritual?" Hotep asked, after a thoughtful silence.

"I have a distaste for the horrors it compels and am ignorant of their use," Kenkenes answered stubbornly.

"Kenkenes," the scribe began, "Law is a most inexorable thing. It is the governor of the Infinite. It

is a tyrant, which, good or bad, can demand and enforce obedience to its fiats. It is a capricious thing and it drags its vassal—the whole created world —after it in its mutations, or stamps the rebel into the dust while the time-serving obedient ones applaud. So thou hast set up resistance against a thing greater than gods and men and I can not see thee undone. I love thee, but I should be an untrue friend did I abet thee in thy lawlessness. Submit gracefully and thy cause shall have an audience with Law some day—if it have merit."

The young sculptor's face was passive, but his eyes were fixed sadly on the remote stars strewn above him. He felt inexpressibly solitary. His zest in his convictions did not flag, but it seemed that the whole world and the heavens had receded and left him alone with them.

Again Hotep spoke.

"There is more court gossip," he began cheerily, as if no word had been said that could depress the tone of the conversation.

Kenkenes accepted the new subject gladly.

"Out with it," he said. "Within the four walls of my world I hear naught but the clink of mallet and falling stone."

"The breach between Meneptah and Amon-meses, his mutinous brother, may be healed by a wedding."

"So?"

"Of a surety—nay, and not of a surety, either, but mayhap. A match between the niece of Amon-meses, the Princess Ta-user, and the heir, Rameses."

Kenkenes sat up again in his earnestness. "Nay," he exclaimed. "Never!"

"Wherefore, I pray thee?" Hotep asked with a deprecating smile.

"There is no mating between the lion and the eagle; the stag and the asp! They could not love."

"Thou dreamy idealist!" Hotep laughed. "The half of great marriages are moves of strategy, attended more by Set* than Athor.† Ta-user is mad for the crown, Rameses for undisputed power. Each has one of these two desirable things to give the other."

"And how shall they appease Athor?" Kenkenes demanded warmly. "Ta-user loves Siptah, the son of Amon-meses, and Rameses will crown whom he loves though he had a thousand other crown-loving, treaty-dowered wives!"

Hotep smiled. "I thought the four walls of thy world hedged thee, but it seems thou art right well acquainted with royalty."

"Scoff!" Kenkenes cried. "But I can tell thee this: Rameses will put his foot on the neck of Amon-meses if the pretender trouble him, and will wed with a slave-girl if she break the armor over his iron heart."

Hotep laughed again and suggested another subject.

"The new fan-bearer," he began.

"Nay, what of him?" Kenkenes broke in at once. "And shall we quarrel about him, also?"

"Dost thou know him?" Hotep queried.

"Right well—from afar and by hearsay."

"Do thou express thyself first concerning him, and

*Set—the war-god.

†Athor—the Egyptian Venus; the feminine love-deity.

I shall treat thee to the courtier's diplomacy if I agree not."

"I like him not," Kenkenes responded bluntly.

Hotep leaned toward him, with the smile gone from his face, the jest from his manner, and laid his hand on the sculptor's. The pressure spoke eloquently of hearty concord. "But he has a charming daughter," he said.

Kenkenes inspected his friend's face critically, but there was nothing to be read thereon.

A palace attendant approached across the paved roof and bent before the scribe.

"A summons from the Son of Ptah, my Lord," he said.

"At this hour?" Hotep said in some surprise as he arose. "I shall return immediately," he told Kenkenes.

"Nay," the sculptor observed, "my time is nearly gone. Let me depart now."

"Not so. I would go with thee. This will be no more than a note. If it be more I shall put mine underlings to the task."

He disappeared in the dark. Kenkenes lay back on the divan and thought on the many things that the scribe had told him. But chiefly he pondered on Harhat and the Israelite.

When Hotep returned he carried his cowl and mantle, and a scroll. "I too, am become a messenger," he said, "but I am self-appointed. This note was to go by a palace courier, but I relieved him of the task."

The pair made ready and departed through the still populous streets of Thebes to the Nile. There they were ferried over to the wharves of Luxor.

At the temple the porter conducted them into the chamber in which the ancient prelate spent his shortening hours of labor. He was there now, at his table, and greeted the young men with a nod. But taking a second look at Hotep, he beckoned him with a shaking finger.

"Didst bring me aught, my son?" he asked as the scribe bent over him.

"Aye, holy Father; this message to the taskmaster over Pa-Ramesu."

"Ah," the old man said. "Is that not yet gone?"

"Nay, the Pharaoh asks that thou insert the name of him whom thou didst recommend for Atsu's place. The Son of Ptah had forgotten him."

The old man pushed several scrolls aside and prepared to make the addition.

"But thou art weary, holy Father; let me do it," Hotep protested gently.

"Nay, nay, I can do it," the old man insisted. "See!" drawing forth a scroll unaddressed. "I have written all this in an hour. O aye, I can write with the young men yet." He made the interlineation, rolled the scroll and sealed it. "I am sturdy, still." At that moment, he dropped his pen on the floor and bent to pick it up, but was forestalled by Hotep. Then he addressed the scrolls, carefully dried the ink with a sprinkling of sand and delivered one to Hotep, the other to Kenkenes. "This to the king, and that to Snofru. The gods give thee safe journey," he continued to Kenkenes. "Who art thou, my son?"

"I am the son of Mentu, holy Father. My name is Kenkenes," the young man answered.

"Mentu, the royal sculptor?"

Kenkenes bowed.

"Nay, but I am glad. I knew thy father, and since thou art of his blood, thou art faithful. Let neither death nor fear overtake thee, for thou hast the peace of Egypt in thy very hands. Fail not, I charge thee!"

After a reverent farewell, the two young men went forth.

A slender Egyptian youth went with them to the wharves and awakened the sleeping crew of a bari.

Hotep they carried across and set ashore on the western side.

"May the same favoring god that brought thee hither, grant thee a safe journey home, my friend. The court comes to Memphis shortly. Till then, farewell," said Hotep.

"All Memphis will hail her illustrious son, O Hotep. Farewell."

It was not long until the sculptor was drifting down toward Memphis under a starry sky—the shadowy temples of Thebes hidden by the sudden closing-in of the river-hills about her.

CHAPTER VII

ATHOR, THE GOLDEN

At sunrise the morning after his return from On, Kenkenes appeared at the Nile, attended by a burden-bearing slave.

The first lean, brown boatman who touched his knee and offered his bari for hire, Kenkenes patronized. The slave had eased his load into the boat and Kenkenes was on the point of embarking when a four-oared bari, which had passed them like the wind a moment before, put about several rods above them and returned to the group on shore.

A bent and withered servitor was standing in the bow of the boat, wildly gesticulating, as if he feared Kenkenes would insist on pulling away despite his efforts. The young man recognized the servant of Snofru, old Ranas.

The large bari was beached and the servitor alighted with agility and, beckoning to Kenkenes, took him aside.

"There has been an error—a grave error, concerning the message," the old man began in excitement; "but thou art in no wise at fault. Yet mayhap thou canst aid us in unraveling the tangle. See!"

He displayed the linen-wrapped roll, the covering split where Snofru had opened it, but the wavering

hieratic characters of the address in Loi's hand, still intact.

When the young sculptor had gazed, the old servant nervously undid the roll, and showed within a letter to the commander over Pa-Ramesu, written in the strong epistolary symbols of the royal scribe.

Kenkenes frowned with vexation. Innocent and efficient though he had been, the miscarriage of his mission stung him nevertheless. The blunder was not long a mystery to him.

Summoning all the patience at his command, he recounted the events in the apartments of the ancient hierarch of Amen.

"There were two scrolls," he explained; "one to the Servant of Ra at On, the other to Atsu. The holy father sealed them both before he addressed them and confused the directions. The one which I should have brought to thine august master, hath gone to the taskmaster over Pa-Ramesu."

"Thou madest all speed?" the servant demanded, trembling with eagerness.

"A half-day's journey less than the usual time I made in returning. I doubt much, if the messenger with the other scroll hath passed Memphis yet, since he may not have been despatched in such hot haste. Furthermore, because of the festivities in Tape, it would have been well-nigh impossible for him to hire a boat until the next day."

This information kindled a light of hope on the old servant's face.

"Thou givest me life again," he exclaimed. "The blessings of Ra be upon thee!"

Without further words he ran back to the boat, and

the last Kenkenes saw of him, he was frantically urging his boatmen to greater speed, back to On.

Kenkenes had come to the Nile that morning, rejoicing in the propitiousness of his opportunity. Mentu was at that moment in On, seeing to the decoration of the second obelisk reared by Meneptah to the sun. The great artist had prepared to be absent a month, and had left no work for his son to do. But the coming of Ranas with the news of his mission's failure had filled Kenkenes with angry discomfiture.

He dismissed his slave and rowed down-stream toward Masaarah.

As he approached the abandoned wharf, a glance showed him that some effort toward restoring it had been made. The overgrowth of vines had been cut away and the level of the top had been raised by several fragments of rough stone.

The tracks of heavy sledges had crushed the young grain across the field toward the cliffs.

Kenkenes stood up and looked toward the terraced front of the hills, in which were the quarries.

There were dust, smoke, stir and moving figures.

The stone-pits were active again after the lapse of half a century.

"By the grace of the mutable Hathors," the young man muttered as he dropped back into his seat, "my father may yet decorate a temple to Set, but by the same favor, it seems that I shall be snatched from the brink of a sacrilege."

He permitted his boat to drift while he contemplated his predicament. Suddenly he smote his hands together.

"Grant me pardon, ye Seven Sisters!" he exclaimed.

"I misread your decree. Ye have but covered my tracks toward transgression."

After a little thought he resumed his felicitations.

"Who of Memphis will think I come to Masaarah, save to look after the taking out of stone? Is it not part of my craft? Nay, but I shall make offering in the temple for this. And need any of these unhappy creatures in Masaarah see me except as it pleases me to show myself?"

He seized his oars and rowed down the river another furlong. Leaving the craft fixed in the tangle of herbage at the water's edge, he shouldered his cargo and crossed the narrow plain to the cliffs below Masaarah. There he made a difficult ascent of the fronts facing the Nile and reached his block of stone without approaching the hamlet of laborers.

Depositing his burden, he set forth to reconnoiter.

He descended again into the Nile valley by the way he had come and wandered toward the mouth of the gorge. From a little distance he looked upon a scene of great activity. In the shadow of one of the dilapidated hovels, four humped oxen stood, their heavy harness still hanging upon them, though the sledges they drew, covered with stone dust and broken pieces, were some distance away from them. A company of half a score of children were ascending in single file, along a slanting plane of planks, into the hollow in the cliff upon which work had been renewed. Along the rock-wall ahead of them a scaffold had been erected and here were men drilling holes in the stone, or driving wooden wedges into the holes already made, or pouring water on the wedges as the skins the children bore were passed up to them.

Kenkenes picked his way through the debris of sticks, stones, dust and cast-off water-skins, and serenely disregarding the stare of the laborers, went up to the edge of the stone-pit and watched the work with interest. A constant stream of broken stone rattled down under the scaffold and long runlets of water fed an ever increasing pool in the depression before the cliff. A single slab of irregular dimensions lay on the sand at the base of a wooden chute, down which it had descended from the hollow in the cliff the evening before. The cavity it left bade fair to enlarge by nightfall, for the swelling wedges were rending another slab from its bedding with loud reports and the sudden etching of fissures.

The young sculptor noted with some wonder that the laborers were Israelites.

After a time Kenkenes turned away and addressed one of the bearded men at that moment ascending the wooden plane.

"What do ye here?" he asked.

The man answered in unready Egyptian, but, for an inferior, in a manner curiously collected.

"The Pharaoh addeth to the burden of the chosen people. We dig stone for a temple to the war-god."

"The chosen people!" Kenkenes repeated inquiringly.

"The children of Israel," the Hebrew explained. Kenkenes lifted one eyebrow quizzically and went his way. As he leaped up into the gorge he vaguely realized that he had seen no trace of an encampment near the hamlet, which he knew to be uninhabitable.

"Of a truth, the chosen people seem to follow me

of late," he said to himself as he rambled up the valley. "Meneptah must have scattered them out of Goshen into all the corners of Egypt."

As he turned the last winding of the gorge he came upon a cluster of some threescore tents, spread over the level pocket at the valley's end. Almost against the northern wall the house of the commander had been built to receive the earliest shadow of the afternoon. The military standard was raised upon its roof and a scribe, making entries on a roll of linen, sat cross-legged on a mat before the door. In one of the narrow ways between the tents an old woman, very bowed and voluminously clad, prepared a great hamper of lentils and another of papyrus root for the noonday meal. One or two children sitting on the earth beside her rendered her assistance, and a third kept the turf fire glowing under a huge bubbling caldron. Kenkenes passed through the camp by this narrow way and paused to look with much curiosity at the ancient Israelite. Never had he seen any old person so active or a slave so wrapped in covering. He hoped she would lift her head that he might see her face; and even as he wished, she pierced him with a look which, from her midnight eyes, seemed like lightning from a thunder-cloud.

"Gods!" he exclaimed as he retreated up the slope behind the camp. And a moment later he continued his soliloquy in a voice that struggled between mirth and amazement: "Have I never seen an Israelite until I beheld these twain, the Lady Miriam and that bent dart of lightning in the valley? If these be Israelites I never saw one before. If those cowed shepherds

that have strayed now and again out of Goshen be Hebrews, then these are not. And the gods shield me from the disfavor of them, be they slaves or sibyls!"

When he reached his block of stone he unrolled his load of equipments and set to work without delay. He was remote from any possible interruption from Memphis, and the slaves in the gorge and in the stone-pits had no opportunity to come upon his sacrilege in idle hours. They would be held like prisoners within the limits of the quarries. His sense of security had been strengthened by the renewed activities in Masaarah.

With a shovel of tamarisk he cleared the slab of its drift of sand. He found that the block broadened at the base and was separate from the sheet of rock on which it stood. Among his supplies was a roll of reed matting, and with this cut into proper lengths, he carpeted a considerable space about the block. Precaution rather than luxury had prompted this procedure, since the chipped stone falling on the covering could be carried cleanly and at once from the spot.

Pausing long enough to eat a thin slice of white bread and gazelle-meat, and to drink a draft from the porous and ever cooling water bottle, he turned to the protection and concealment of his statue.

The place was strewn with tolerably regular fragments, and the building of a segment of wall to the north at the edge of the matting required more time than strength or skill. He built solidly against the penetrative sand, and as high as his head. The early afternoon blazed upon him and passed into the mellower hours of the later day before he had finished. He hid his shovel and two cylindrical billets of wood, such as

were used to roll great weights, under the edge of his reed carpet, and his preparations were complete. He wiped his brow, congratulating himself on the snugness of his retreat and the auspicious beginning of his transgression.

Weary and happy, he rowed himself back to Memphis and slept soundly on the eve of a great offense against the laws of Egypt.

But the next day, when the young sculptor faced the moment of actual creation, he realized that his goddess must take form from an unembodied idea. The ritual had been his guide before, and his genius, set free to soar as it would, fluttered wildly without direction. His visions were troubled with glamours of the old conventional forms; his idea tantalized him with glimpses of its perfect self too fleeting for him to grasp. The sensation was not new to him. During his maturer years he had tried to remember his mother's face with the same yearning and heart-hurting disappointment. But this time he groped after attributes which should shape the features—he had spirit, not form, in mind; and the odds against which his unguided genius must battle were too heroic for it to succeed without aid. The young sculptor realized that he was in need of a model. Stoically, he admitted that such a thing was as impossible as it was indispensable. It seemed that he had met complete bafflement.

He took up his tools and returned to Memphis. But each succeeding morning found him in the desert again, desperately hopeful—each succeeding evening, in the city disheartened and silent.

So it followed for several days.

On the sixth of January the festival in honor of the return of Isis from Phenicia was celebrated in Memphis. Kenkenes left the revel in mid-afternoon and crossed the Nile to the hills. He found no content away from his block of stone—no happiness before it. But he wandered back to the seclusion of the niche that he might be moody and sad of eye in all security.

The stone-pits were deserted. The festivities in Memphis had extended their holiday to the dreary camp at Masaarah. Kenkenes climbed up to his retreat and remained there only a little time. The unhewn rock mocked him.

He descended through the gorge and found that the Hebrews were but nominally idle. A rope-walk had been constructed and the men were twisting cables of tough fiber. The Egyptians lounged in the long shadows of the late afternoon and directed the work with no effort and little concern. The young sculptor overlooked the scene as long as it interested him and continued down the valley toward the Nile.

Presently a little company of Hebrew children approached, their bare feet making velvety sounds in the silence of the ravine. Each balanced a skin of water on his head. The little line obsequiously curved outward to let the nobleman pass, and one by one the sturdy children turned their luminous eyes up to him, some with a flash of white teeth, some with a downward dip of a bashful head. One of them disengaged a hand from his burden and swept a tangle of moist black curls away from his eyes. The sun of the desert had not penetrated that pretty thatch and the forehead was as fair as a lotus flower.

Kenkenes caught himself looking sharply at each

face as he passed, for it contained somewhat of that for which he sought. As he walked along looking after them he became aware that some one was near him. He turned his head and stopped in his tracks.

He confronted his idea embodied—Athor, the Golden!

It was an Israelitish maiden, barely sixteen years old, but in all his life he had never looked upon such beauty. He had gazed with pleased eyes on the slender blush-tinted throats and wrists of the Egyptian beauties, but never had he beheld such whiteness of flesh as this. He had sunk himself in the depths of the dusky, amorous eyes of high-born women of Memphis, but here were fathomless profundities of azure that abashed the heavens. He had been very near to loveliest hair of Egypt, so close that its odorous filaments had blown across his face and his artist senses had been caught and tangled in its ebon sorcery. But down each side this broad brow was a rippling wave of gold, over each shoulder a heavy braid of gold that fell, straightened by its own weight, a span below the waist. The winds of the desert had roughened it and the bright threads made a nimbus about the head. Its glory overreached his senses and besieged his soul. Here was not witchery, but exaltation.

Enraptured with her beauty, her perfect fulfilment of his needs, he realized last the unlovely features of her presence. She balanced a heavy water pitcher on her head and wore a rough surplice, more decorous than the dress of the average bondwoman, but the habit of a slave, nevertheless. He had halted directly in her path, and after a moment's hesitancy she passed around him and went on.

Immediately Kenkenes recovered himself and with a few steps overtook her. Without ceremony he transferred the heavy pitcher to his own shoulder. The girl turned her perfect face, full of amazement, to him, and a wave of color dyed it swiftly.

"Thy burden is heavy, maiden," was all he said.

The bulk of the jar on the farther shoulder made it necessary for him to turn his face toward her, but she was uneasy under the intent gaze of his level black eyes. She dropped behind him, but he slackened his pace and kept beside her. For the moment he was no longer the man of pulse and susceptibility but the artist. Therefore her thoughts and sensations were apart from his concern. The unfamiliar perfection of the Semitic countenance bewildered him. He took up his panegyric. Never was a mortal countenance so near divine. And the sumptuousness of her figure—its faultless curves and lines, its lissome roundness, its young grace, the beauty of arm and neck and ankle! Ah! never did anything entirely earthly dwell in so fair, so splendid a form.

As they neared the camp the girl spoke to him for the first time. He recognized in her voice the same serene tone he had noted in his talk with the Hebrew some days before.

"Give me my burden now," she said. "Thou hast affronted thy rank for me, and I thank thee many times."

The sculptor paused and for a moment stood embarrassed. It went sorely against his gallantry to lay the burden again upon her and he said as much.

"Nay, Egypt has no qualms against loading the

Hebrew," she said quietly. "Wouldst thou put thy nation to shame?"

Kenkenes opened his eyes in some astonishment.

"Now am I even more loath," he declared. "What art thou called?"

"Rachel."

"It hath an intrepid sound, but Athor would become thee better. Now I am a sculptor from the city, come to study thy women for a frieze," he continued unblushingly, "and I would go no farther in my search. Rachel repeated will be beauty multiplied. Let me see thee once in a while,—to-morrow."

A sudden flush swept over her face and her eyes darkened.

"It shall not keep thee from thy labor," he added persuasively.

The color deepened and she made a motion of dissent.

"Nay! thou dost not refuse me!" he exclaimed, his astonishment evident in his voice.

"Of a surety," she replied. "Give me my burden, I pray thee."

Dumb with amazement, too genuine to contain any anger, Kenkenes obeyed. As she went up the shady gorge, walking unsteadily under the heavy pitcher, he stood looking after her in eloquent silence.

And in eloquent silence he turned at last and continued down the valley. There was nothing to be said. His appreciation of his own discomfiture was too large for any expression.

In a few steps he met the short captain who governed the quarries. Kenkenes guessed his office by

his dress. He was adorned in festal trappings, for he had spent most of the day in revel across the Nile.

"Dost thou know Rachel, the Israelitish maiden?" Kenkenes asked, planting himself in the man's way.

"The yellow-haired Judahite?" the man inquired, a little surprised.

"Even so," was the reply.

The soldier nodded.

"Look to it that she is put to light labor," the sculptor continued, gazing loftily down into the narrow eyes. The soldier squared off and inspected the nobleman. It did not take him long to acknowledge the young sculptor's right to command.

"It does not pay to be tender with an Israelite," the man answered sourly.

Kenkenes thrust his hand into the folds of his tunic over his breast and, drawing forth a number of golden rings strung on a cord, jingled them musically.

The soldier grinned.

"That will coax a man out of his dearest prejudice. I will put her over the children."

Kenkenes dropped the money into the man's palm.

"I shall have an eye to thee," he said warningly. "Cheat me not."

He went his way. The incident restored to him the power of speech.

"Now, by Horus," he began, "am I to be denied by an Israelite that which the favoring Hathors designed I should have? Not while the arts of strategy abide within me. The children, I take it, will come here with the water," he cogitated, stamping upon the wet and deserted ledge which he had reached, "and here will she be, also."

He raised his eyes to the ragged line of rocks topping the northern wall of the gorge.

"I shall perch myself there like a sacred hawk and filch her likeness. Nay, now that I come to ponder on it, it is doubtless better that she know naught about it. She might drop certain things to the Egyptians hereabout that would lead to mine undoing. The gods are with me, of a truth."

He descended into the larger valley and went singing toward the Nile.

CHAPTER VIII

THE PUNISHMENT OF ATSU

One late afternoon, in the streets of Pa Ramesu, a curious new-comer bowed before Atsu, the commander of Israel of the treasure city. The visitor was old and tremulous from fatigue, and the stains of hard travel were evident upon him.

"Greeting, Atsu. The peace of the divine Mother attend thee," he said. "Snofru, the beloved of Ra at On, sends thee greeting by his servant, Ranas."

"Greeting," the taskmaster replied, after he had inspected the white-browed servant. "The shelter of my roof and the bread of my board are thine;" adding after a little pause, "and in truth thou seemest to need these things."

The old man smiled an odd wry smile and followed lamely after the long swinging stride of the commander toward the headquarters on the knoll.

Within the house of Atsu, Ranas delivered into the hands of the soldier the message that Kenkenes had brought to Snofru. While Atsu undid the roll the old servant made voluble apologies for the broken seal. The commander stepped to the doorway for better light and read the writing.

The old servant back in the dusk of the interior saw the stern face harden, the heavy brows knit blackly, the dusky red fade from the cheek. Ranas knew what

the soldier read, for he had had the roll with its broken seal, from On to Memphis and from Memphis back to On again. But with all his astuteness he could not have guessed what extremes of wrath and grief the insulted taskmaster suffered. The sheet rolled itself together again and was broken and crushed in the iron fingers that gripped it. Presently he tossed it aside. Hardly had it left his hand before he hastened to pick it up, straightened it out and re-read it feverishly. He forgot the old servant; but had he remembered the man's curious gaze, no resolution could have hidden that joy which slowly wrote itself upon his face. There was balm in the barb for all the wound it made. This is what he read:

"To Atsu, Commander over the Builders of Pa-Ramesu, These: To mine ears hath come report of mutiny and idleness through thy weak government of my bond-people. Also that thou hast enforced my commands but feebly, and so defeated my purposes, which were my sire's, after whose illustrious example I reign.

"For these and kindred inefficiencies art thou removed from the government over Pa-Ramesu.

"I hereby bestow upon thee another office within the limits of thy capacity. Thou wilt take up the flagellum over Masaarah when thou hast surrendered Pa-Ramesu to thy successor.

"By this thou shalt learn that the Pharaohs will be ably served.

"Horemheb of Bubastis, thy successor, accompanieth these.

"Give him honor. MENEPTAH."

The diction was manifestly the king's. None other of high estate would have inspired so spiteful a letter. But the appointment to Masaarah made Atsu forget the sting in the second reading. To Masaarah! To Masaarah and Rachel! He folded the broken sheet and thrust it into his bosom. Meeting the keen eye of his guest, the color rushed back to the taskmaster's face and he summoned two attendant Hebrews to wait upon the old man while he went forth to gain composure in the air.

After the old man had been fed and given such other comfort as the soldier's house afforded, the taskmaster returned. Then Ranas shifted his position so that he might watch his host's face most intelligently, and turned to the real purpose of his visit.

"Thou canst see, my master, that if thy message bore the wrapping for the epistle to Snofru, the message to the holy father must have borne thy name. Thou hast received no letter as yet which was not intended for thee?"

The question was delivered politely, but the old man thrust his curious face forward and shook his head with a combination of interrogation and dissent, which was highly insincere.

"I have received naught which was not intended for me," the taskmaster replied warmly.

After a moment's intent contemplation of Atsu's face the courier went on: "Nay, so had I thought. The messenger came to Snofru with all speed and outstripped the courier bound for Pa-Ramesu. It is even as I had thought. He may arrive shortly, but I must tarry till he comes."

Atsu assented bluntly, and after that if they talked

it was of impersonal things and in a desultory manner. When night came Atsu called his attendants and had the weary old man put to bed in a curtained corner of the house. For himself there was no sleep.

At midnight there came the beat of hoofs on the dust-muffled ways of Pa-Ramesu. A sentry knocked at the door of the commander and announced a visitor. Atsu, who still sat under the unextinguished reed light, greeted the new-comer with an exclamation of concern. The man was covered with dust, his dress was torn and bloody, his right hand swathed in cloths, and his lip, right cheek and eye were swollen and discolored.

"By Horus, friend, thou lookest ill-used," the taskmaster exclaimed. "What has befallen thee?"

"Naught—naught of any lasting hurt," the new-comer replied carelessly. "We were set upon by a troop of murdering Bedouins this side of Bubastis and had a pretty fight."

"Aye, thou hast the stamp of its beauty upon thy face. A slave, here, with some balsam," Atsu continued, addressing the sentry, "and a captain of the constabulary next. We will cure these Bedouins and their hurt at once."

"Nay," the visitor protested. "It is only a spear-slit in my hand, and a flying stirrup marred my face. I am well. Look to the Bedouins, however; they ran our messenger through—Set consume them!"

"Doubt not, we shall look to them. They grow strangely insolent of late."

"Small wonder," the other responded heartily. "Is not the whole north a seething pot of lawlessness; and by the demons of Amenti, is not the Israelite the fire

under the caldron? Nay, but I shall have especial joy in damping him!"

The man laughed and dropped into the chair Atsu had offered him.

"Then thou art Horemheb, the new taskmaster over Pa-Ramesu?"

"So! has my news outridden me?" the man exclaimed in very evident amazement.

Ranas, indifferently clad in a hastily donned kamis, at this moment parted the curtains of his retreat and came forth with an apologetic courtesy.

"And thy messenger, sir? What of him?" he asked eagerly.

"Dead, and left at a wayside house."

"And the message?" the old man persisted.

Horemheb surveyed him with increasing astonishment.

"Where hast thou these tidings?" he demanded. "They are scarce three hours old. Who reached thee with them before me?"

Atsu interposed and explained the interchange of letters.

"Oh," said Horemheb. "So the correct message came to thee, nevertheless, good Atsu. But I can not tell thee aught of the other. It is lost."

"Lost!" Ranas shrieked.

"Gods! old man. It was only pigment and papyrus, not gold or jewels. A kindly disposed Hebrew came to our help with some of his people, and we put the Bedouins to flight. But after the struggle, search as we might with torches which the Hebrew brought, the message was not to be found. A Bedouin made off with it, I doubt not."

Ranas stood speechless for an instant, and then he rushed up to the new taskmaster.

"His name?" he demanded fiercely. "The Hebrew! What was he like? Where does he dwell?"

"A murrain on the maniac!" Horemheb exploded. "He called himself Aaron!"

Ranas staggered against the wall for support and beat the air with his arms.

"Aaron, the brother of Mesu! O ye inscrutable Hathors!" he babbled. "A Bedouin made off with it! Oh! Oh! What idiocy!"

CHAPTER IX

THE COLLAR OF GOLD

The next morning after his meeting with the golden-haired Israelite, Kenkenes came early to the line of rocks that topped the north wall of the gorge and, ensconced between the gray fragments, looked down unseen on her whenever she came to the valley's mouth. All day long the children came staggering up from the Nile, laden with dripping hides, or returned in a free and ragged line down the green slope of the field to the river again.

Vastly more simple and time-saving would have been one of the capacious water carts. But what would have employed these ten youthful Hebrews in the event of such improvement? There was to be no labor-saving in the quarries. Therefore, through the dust, up the weary slanting plane, again and again till the day's work amounted to a journey of miles, the Hebrew children toiled with their captain and co-laborer, Rachel.

At the summit of the wooden slope the beautiful Israelite, who had preceded her charges, passed up the burden of each one to the Hebrews on the scaffold. From his aery Kenkenes watched this particular phase of her tasks with interest. She was not too far from him for the details of her movements to be distinguish-

able, and the posture of the outstretched arms and lifted face fulfilled his requirements. He abandoned the modeling of her features for that day and copied the attitude. Once in the morning and once in the afternoon a countryman of hers, strong, young and but lightly bearded, stepped down from his place on the scaffold and relieved her. The sculptor noted the act with some degree of disquiet, hoping that the graceful protests of the girl might prevail. When the stalwart Hebrew overrode her remonstrances, and motioned her toward a place at the side of the frame-work where she might rest, the young sculptor frowned impatiently. But his humane heart chid him and he waited with some assumption of grace till she should take up her burden again.

At sunset he retired cautiously, but several dawns found him among the rocks, with reed pen, papyri and molds of clay. When he climbed to his retreat within the walls of stone, on the hillside in the late afternoon, he hid several studies of the girl's head and statuettes of clay under the matting.

At last he began the creation of Athor the Golden.

For days he labored feverishly, forgetting to eat, fretting because the sun set and the darkness held sway for so long. Having overstepped the law, he placed no limit to the extent of his artistic transgression.

After choosing nature as his model, he followed it slavishly. On the occasion of his initial departure from the accepted rules, he had never dreamed it possible to disregard ritualistic commandments so absolutely. He even ignored the passive and meditative repose, immemorial on the carven countenances of Egypt.

The face of Athor, as she put forth her arms to receive the sun, must show love, submission, eagerness and great appeal.

As Kenkenes said this thing to himself, he lowered chisel and mallet and paused. Posture and form would avail nothing without these emotions written on the face. He began to wonder if he might carve them, unaided. He had not found them in the Israelite, and he confessed to himself, with a little laugh, a doubt that he should ever see them on her countenance.

Then a vagabond impulse presented itself unbidden in his mind and was frowned down with a blush of apology to himself. And yet he remembered his coquetry with the Lady Ta-meri as some small defense in the form of precedent.

"Nay," he replied to this evidence, "it is a different woman. Between myself and Ta-meri it is even odds, and the vanquished will have deserved his defeat."

That evening—it was several days after the face of the goddess had begun to emerge from the block of stone—he went to the upper end of the gorge and passed through the camp on his way home, that he might meet his model.

The laborers had not returned from the quarries, though the evening meal bubbled and fumed over the fires in the narrow avenue between the tents. Kenkenes passed by on the outskirts of the encampment and went on.

Deep shadow lay on the stone-pits when Kenkenes reached the mouth of the gorge, and a cool wind from the Nile swept across the grain. The day's work had been prolonged in the lowering of a huge slab from its position in its native bed. The monolith was already

on the brink of the wooden incline, and every man was at the windlasses by which the cables controlling its descent were paid out. Kenkenes saw at a glance that none of the water-bearers was present, and he knew the lovely Israelite was with them. He did not pause.

Before the sound of the quarry stir had been left behind he heard a sharp report, the frightened shrieks of women and shouts of warning. He looked back in time to see the huge stone turn part way round on the chute and rush, end first, earthward. Expectant silence fell, broken only by the vicious snarl of a flying windlass crank. But in an instant the great slab struck the earth with a thunderous sound that reverberated again and again from the barren hills about. A vast all-enveloping cloud of dust and earth filled the hollow quarry like smoke from an explosion. But there was no further outcry, and through the outskirts of the lifting cloud men were seen making deliberate preparations to repair the parted cable. Assured that no calamity had occurred, Kenkenes went on.

In a few steps he met the children water-bearers flying to the scene of the accident. Not one of them bore a water-skin. The excited young Hebrews did not stop to question the sculptor, but ran on, and were swallowed up in dust.

Half-way to the Nile he came upon her whom he sought. She was standing alone in the midst of ten sheepskins, and the grain was wetted with the spilled water. He pointed to the discarded hides about her.

"The camp will go thirsty if the runaways do not return," he said. "Thy burden is too heavy for even me to-night."

"They will return," she answered.

"Aye, it was naught but a parting cable and a falling rock. I was near and saw no evidence of disaster. Had the children asked me, I should have told them as much."

"They will return," she repeated, and Kenkenes fancied that there was a dismissal in this quiet repetition. But he did not mean to see it. He went on, with a smile.

"I am glad they did not stop, for I wanted to see thee, with that frightened longing of a man who hath resolved on confession and meeteth his confessor on a sudden. Now that the moment hath arrived I marvel how I shall make my peace with Athor, whose command I most deliberately broke."

She raised her beautiful eyes to his face and waited for him to proceed. The pose of the head was exactly what he wanted. Rapidly he compared every detail of her face with his memory of the statue of Athor, noting with satisfaction that his studies had been happily faithful. His scrutiny was so swift and skilful that there seemed to be nothing unusual in his gaze.

"I am culpable but impenitent," he continued. "I shall not forswear mine offense. Neither is there any need of a plea to justify myself, for my very sin is its own justification. Behold me! I perched myself like a sacred hawk at the mouth of the valley and filched thy likeness. Do with me as thou wilt, but I shall die reiterating approval of my deed."

His extravagant speech wrought an interesting change on the face before him. There was a pronounced curve of her mouth, a slight tension in the chiseled nostril—in fact, an indefinable disdain that had not been there before. It would become Athor

well. Kenkenes understood the look but he did not flinch. Instead he let his head drop slowly until he looked at her from under his brows. Then he summoned into his eyes all the wounded feeling, pathos, soft reproach and appeal, of which his graceless young heart was capable, and gazed at her.

Khufu might have been as easily melted by the twinkle of a rain drop. Never in his life had he faced such comprehensive contemplation. Calm, monumental and icy disdain deepened on every feature.

Kenkenes stood motionless and suffered her to look at him. Being a man of fine soul, the eloquent gaze spoke well-deserved rebuke. He knew that his color had risen, and his eyes fell in spite of heroic efforts to keep them steady. His sensations were unique; never had he experienced the like. When he recovered himself her blue eyes were fixed absently on the distant quarries.

Every impulse urged him to set himself right in the eyes of this most discerning slave.

"Wilt thou forgive me?" he asked earnestly. "I would I could make thee know I crave thy good will."

There was no mistaking the honesty in these words. Her face relaxed instantly.

"But I fear I have not set about it wisely," he added. "Let me give thee a peace-offering to prove my contrition."

He slipped from about his neck the collar of golden rings and moved forward to put it about her throat.

She drew back, her face flushing hotly under an expression of positive pain.

Kenkenes dropped his hands to his sides with a limpness highly suggestive of desperate perplexity.

Was not this a slave? And yet here was the fine feeling of a princess. He stood, for once in his life, at a loss what to do. He could not depart without the greatest awkwardness, and yet, if he lingered, he sacrificed his comfort. Presently he exclaimed helplessly:

"Rachel, do thou tell me what to say or do. It seems that I but sink myself the deeper in the quicksand of thy disapproval at every struggle to escape. Do thou lead me out."

He had met a slave, justed with an equal and flung up his hands in surrender to his better. He did not confess this to himself, but his words were admission enough. Never would his high-born spirit have permitted him to make such a declaration to one slavish in soul.

The straightforward acknowledgment of defeat and the genuine concern in his voice were irresistible. She answered him at once, distantly and calmly.

"Thou, as an Egyptian, hast honored me, a Hebrew, with thy notice. I have deserved neither gift nor fee."

"Nay, but let us put it differently," he replied. "I, as a man, have given thee, a maiden, offense, and having repented, would appease thee with a peace-offering. Believe me, I do not jest. By the gentle goddesses, I fear to speak," he added breathlessly.

The Israelite's blue eyes were veiled quickly, but the Egyptian guessed aright that she had hidden a smile in them.

"Am I forgiven?" he persisted.

"So thou wilt offend no further," she said without raising her eyes.

"I promise. And now, since the goddess hath refused mine offering, I may not take it back. What

shall I do with this?" he asked, holding up the collar of gold.

"Put it about thy statue's neck," she said softly.

Kenkenes gasped and retreated a step. Instantly she was imploring his pardon.

"It was a forward spirit in me that made me say it. I pray thee, forgive me."

"Thou hast given no offense, but how dost thou know of this—tell me that."

"I came upon it by accident three days ago. Several of the children had gone fowling for the taskmaster's meal, and were so long absent that I was sent to look for them. The path down the valley is old, and I have followed it with the idea of labor ever in my mind. And this was a moment of freedom, so I thought to spend it where I had not been a slave. I went across the hills, and, being unfamiliar with them, lost my way. When I climbed upon one of the great rocks to overlook the labyrinth, lo! at my feet was the statue. I knew myself the moment I looked, and it was not hard to guess whose work it was."

She paused and looked at him with appeal on her face.

"Thou hast told no one?"

"Nay," was the quick and earnest answer.

"Thou hast caught me in a falsehood," he said.

The statement was almost brutal in its directness. But the question that came back swiftly was not less pointed.

"There was no frieze of bondmaidens—naught of anything thou hast told me?"

"Nay, not anything. I am carving a statue against the canons of the sculptor's ritual for the sake of my

love of beauty. Until thou didst come upon it, I alone possessed the secret. Thou knowest the punishment which will overtake me?"

"Aye, I know right well. Yet fear not. The statue is right cunningly concealed and none will ever find it, for the children were unsuccessful and the meals for the overseer will be brought him from the city hereafter. And I will not betray thee—I give thee my word."

Her tone was soft and earnest; her assurances were spoken so confidently, her interest was so genuine, that a queer and unaccountable satisfaction possessed the young artist at once.

At this moment the runaway water-bearers came in sight and in obedience to very evident dismissal in the Israelite's eyes, Kenkenes bade her farewell and left her.

But he had not gone two paces before she overtook him.

"Approach thy work from various directions," she cautioned, "else thou wilt wear a path which may spy on thee one day."

The moment the words passed her lips, Kenkenes, who still held the collar, put it about her neck, passing his hands under the thick plaits, and snapped the clasp accurately.

The act was done instantly, and with but a single movement. He was gone, laughing on his way, before she had realized what he had done.

There was revel in the young man's veins that evening, but the great house of his father was silent and lonely. If he would find a companion he must leave its heavy walls. His resolution was not long in

making nor his instinct slow in directing him. An hour after the evening meal, when he entered the chariot that waited, he had laid aside the simple tunic, and in festal attire was, every inch of his many inches, the son of the king's favorite artist. His charioteer drove in the direction of the nomarch's house.

The portress conducted him into the faintly lighted chamber of guests and went forth silently. Kenkenes interpreted her behavior at once.

"There is another guest," he thought with a smile, "and I can name him as promptly as any chanting sorcerer might." When the serving woman returned she bade him follow her and led the way to the house-top.

There, under the subdued light of a single lamp, was the Lady Ta-meri; at her feet, Nechutes.

"I should wear the symbol-broidered robe of a soothsayer," the sculptor told himself.

"You made a longer sojourn of your visit to Tape than you had intended," the lady said, after the greetings.

"Nay, I have been in Memphis twenty days at least."

"So?" queried Nechutes. "Where dost thou keep thyself?"

"In the garb of labor among the ink-pots and papyri of the sculptor class," the lady answered. "I warrant there are pigment marks on his fingers even now."

Kenkenes extended his long right hand to her for inspection. She received it across her pink palm and scrutinized it laughingly.

"Nay, I take it back. Here is naught but henna and a suspicion of attar. He has been idle these days."

"Hast thou forgotten the efficacy of the lemon in the removal of stains?" the sculptor asked with a smile.

The lady frowned.

"Give us thy news from Tape, then," she demanded, putting his hand away.

"The court is coming to Memphis sooner. That is all. O, aye, I had well-nigh forgot. There is also talk of a marriage between Rameses and Ta-user."

"Fie!" the lady scoffed. "Nechutes hath more to tell than that, and he hath stayed in Memphis."

"Thou wilt come to realize some day, Ta-meri, that I am fitted to the yoke of labor, when I fail thee in all the nicer walks thou wouldst have me tread. Come, out with thy gossip, Nechutes."

"I had a letter from Hotep to-day—a budget of news, included with official matters with which the king would acquaint me. Ta-user, with Amon-meses and Siptah, hath joined the court at Tape—"

"And Siptah, she brought with her—" the sculptor interrupted softly.

Nechutes cast an expressive look at Kenkenes and went on.

"And the courting hath begun."

Silence fell, and the lady looked at the two young men with wonder in her eyes.

"Nay, but that is interesting," Kenkenes admitted, recovering himself. "Tell me more."

"The offices of cup-bearer and murket are to be bestowed in Memphis," Nechutes continued.

"And the one falls to Nechutes," the lady declared triumphantly.

"Of a truth thou hast a downy lot before thee, Nechutes," the young sculptor said heartily. "And never one so deserving of it. I give thee joy."

"And the other goes to the noble Mentu," Nechutes added in a meek voice.

"Sphinx!" Ta-meri cried, tapping him on the head. "You did not tell me that."

The surprised delight of Kenkenes was not so bewildering as to blind him to the reason why Nechutes had withheld this news from Ta-meri. The blunt Egyptian was not anxious to speed his rival's cause.

"Does my father know of this?" he asked.

"I doubt not. The same messenger that brought me news of mine own appointment departed for On when he learned that Mentu was there."

"Nay, but that will be wine in his veins," Kenkenes mused happily. "It will make him young again. His late inactivity hath chafed him sorely."

"You have come honestly by your labor-loving," Nechutes commented. "Hotep adds further that Mentu is the only one of the king's new ministers that is no longer a young man."

"It is Rameses who counsels him, I doubt not," the sculptor replied. "He hath great faith in the powers of youth. And behold what a cabinet he hath built up for his father. First," Kenkenes continued, enumerating on his fingers, "there is Nechutes—"

The new cup-bearer waved his hand, and Kenkenes went on.

"There is my father, the murket. He needs no further praise than the utterance of his name. There is Hotep, on whose lips Toth abideth. There is Sene-

feru, the faithful, whom the Rebu dreads. Next is Kephren, the mohar,* who would outshine his father, the right hand of the great Rameses, had he but nations to conquer. After him, Har-hat—"

"Hold! He is not appointed of the prince. He was Meneptah's choice—and his alone," Nechutes interrupted. "It is rumored that Rameses is not over-fond of him."

"He will be put to it to hold his high place in the face of the prince's disfavor," Kenkenes cogitated.

"Nay, but he presses the prince hard for generalship. It must be so, since he could win the king's good will over the protest of Rameses. So I doubt not he can hold his own at court by prudence and strategy."

Meanwhile Ta-meri, in the depths of her chair, gazed at the pair resentfully. They had grown interested in weighty things and had seemingly forgotten her. So she sighed and bethought her how to punish them.

"What a relief it will be when the Pharaoh returns to Memphis!" she murmured in the pause that now followed. "He will be more welcome to me than the Nile overflow. The city has been a desert to me since he departed."

Nechutes looked at her with reproach in his eyes.

"Consider the desert, O sweet Oasis," Kenkenes said softly. "Is not its portion truly grievous if its single palm complain?"

The lady dropped her eyes and her cheeks glowed

*Mohar—The king's pioneer, an office that might be defined as minister of war.

even through the dusk. After the long interval of Nechutes' blunt love-making the sculptor's subtleties fell most gratefully on her ear.

Nechutes scowled, sighed and finally spoke.

"Tape is afflicted in anticipation of the king's departure," he observed disjointedly.

"Tape does not love Meneptah as Memphis loves him," Kenkenes answered. "Hast thou not this moment heard Memphis pine for him? Tape would not have spoken thus. She would have said: 'Would that the king were here that I might ask a boon of him.' Memphis is the cradle of kings; Tape, their tomb. Memphis is full of reverence for the Pharaohs; Tape, of pride; Memphis of loyalty; Tape, of boon-craving. Meneptah returns to the bosom of his mother when he returns to Memphis."

"But he will not remain here long," Nechutes went on. "He goes to Tanis to be near the scene of the Israelitish unrest."

"Alas, Ta-meri, and wilt thou droop again?" Kenkenes asked.

"I fear," she assented with a little sigh. Then, after a pause, she asked: "Does the murket follow the court?"

Kenkenes shook his head. "Not when the Pharaoh travels. But should he depart permanently from Memphis my father would go. Many of the court returning hither will not proceed to Tanis. The city will not be so desolate then as now."

"Nay, but I am glad," she said. "Those who remain will suffice."

"Of a truth?" Nechutes demanded angrily.

"Have I not said?" she replied.

Nechutes rose slowly and made his way to a chair some distance away from her. Kenkenes immediately guessed why the cup-bearer was hurt, but the lady was innocent. He knew that he had but to speak to restore Nechutes to favor.

Meanwhile the lady, amazed and deeply offended at the desertion of the cup-bearer, had turned her back on him. Kenkenes arose.

Ta-meri sat up in alarm.

"O, do not go. You have but this moment come," she said.

"Already have I stayed too long," he replied. "But thy hospitality makes one forget the debt one owes to a prior guest."

She looked at him from under silken lashes.

"Nechutes has misconducted himself," she objected, "and I would not be left alone with him."

"Wouldst thou have me stay and see him restored to favor under my very eyes? Ah, Ta-meri, where is thy womanly compassion?"

She smiled and extended her hand. Kenkenes took it and felt it relax and lie willingly in his palm.

"Nay, do not go," she pleaded softly.

"Give me leave to come again instead."

"To-morrow," she said, half questioning, half commanding. He did not promise, but as he bent over to kiss her hand, he said in a low tone:

"Hast thou forgotten that Nechutes leaves Memphis with the going of the king?"

The lady started and flung a conscience-stricken glance at the scowling cup-bearer. And while her face was turned, Kenkenes departed like a shadow. But the portals of the nomarch's house had hardly closed

behind him before he demanded of himself, impatiently, why he had made Nechutes' peace, why he kept the cup-bearer for ever between himself and Ta-meri. And as if to evade this catechism something arose in him and asked him why he should not.

And to this he could give no answer.

CHAPTER X

THE DEBT OF ISRAEL

For an instant after the sculptor had put the collar about her throat, Rachel stood motionless, her face flushing and whitening with conflicting emotions.

But her indecision was only momentary. Rebellion was in the ascendant.

She thrust her fingers under the band and essayed to wrench off the offending necklace, but the stout fastening held and the flexible braid printed its woof on the back of the soft neck. Almost in tears she undid the clasp and flung the collar away.

It struck the earth with a musical ring, and the green of the wheat hid all but a faint ray of the red metal.

The rout of children descended on her, each clamoring a story of the accident. But without a word she marshaled them and turned once again toward the river to refill the hides. At the water's edge she kept her eyes resolutely from the broad dimpling breast of the Nile toward the south. She feared that she might see the light bari that was driving back to Memphis against that slow but mighty current as easily as if wind and water went with it.

But even before she turned again toward Masaarah, her better nature began to chide her. She remembered her impetuous act with a flush of shame.

"His peace-offering—a proof of his good will, and thou didst mistreat it, as if he had meant it for a purchase or a fee. The indignity thou hast petulantly fancied, Rachel."

After a time another thought came to her.

"The act was not womanly. Wherein hast thou rebuked him, in casting away the trinket? Thou hast the dignity of Israel to uphold in thy dealings with this young man."

When she reached the spot where the collar had fallen, she sought for it furtively, and having found it, thrust it into the bosom of her dress.

"I shall not keep it," she said, quieting the protests of her pride. "I shall make him take it back to-morrow."

Entering her low shelter in the camp some time later, she found Deborah absent. Impelled by an unreasoning desire to keep secret this event, she hastily hid the collar in the sand of the tent floor and laid the straw matting of her bed smoothly over its burial place. Again she struggled with her pride and demanded of herself why she had become secretive.

"Fie!" she replied. "How couldst thou tell this story to Deborah? Why, it is well-nigh unbecoming."

The dusk settled down over the valley. Deborah came in like a phantom from the camp-fires with the evening meal, and the pair sat down together to eat, Rachel silent, Deborah thoughtful.

"Another Egyptian comes to govern Masaarah," the old woman observed. "Agistas departed but now, leaving the camp in charge of the under-drivers."

"It makes little odds with us—this change of taskmasters, Deborah—be he Agistas or any other Egyp-

tian. They are masters and we continue to be slaves," Rachel answered after a little silence.

"Nay, art thou losing spirit?" Deborah asked with animation. "How shall the elders keep of good heart if the young surrender?"

"I despair not," the girl protested. "I did but remark this thing; and I have spoken truly, have I not?"

"Even so. But this evening there must be more recognition in thee of thy lot since it overflows in words. I, too, have spoken truly, have I not?"

Rachel smiled. "It may be," she said.

When they had supped, they went out before the tent to get the cooling air. It was Deborah again that first broke the silence.

"Elias is smitten with blindness from the stone-dust," she said absently.

"For all time?" Rachel asked anxiously.

"Nay, if he could but rest them and bathe them in the proper simples."

"Alas—" Rachel began, but she checked herself hurriedly. "He was my father's servant," she said instead—"the last living one. Jehovah spare him. One by one they fall, until I shall be utterly without tie to prove I once had kindred."

Deborah looked at the girl fixedly for a moment. Then she put up her hand and leaned on the soft young shoulder.

"Am I not left?" she asked.

Rachel passed her arm about the bowed figure, with some compunction for her complaint.

"My mother's friend!" she exclaimed lovingly. "I know she died in peace, remembering that I was left to thy care."

"I mind me," she continued after a little silence, "how tender and frail she was. Thou wast as a strong tree beside her. I seem to myself to be mighty compared to my memory of her."

Deborah took the white hand that lay across her shoulder. "Thou art like to thy father. Thy mother was black-eyed and fragile—born to the soft life of a princess. Misfortune was her death, though she struggled to live for thee. Praise God that thou art like to thy father, else thou hadst died in thine infancy."

"Nay, hath my lot been sterner than the portion of all Israel?"

"Of a surety, thou canst guess it, for are there many of thy tribe like thee—without a kinsman?"

Rachel shook her head, and the old woman continued absently: "Of thy mother's family there were four, but they died of the heavy labor. Thy father, Maai, surnamed the Compassionate, was the eldest of six. They were mighty men, tawny like the lion and as bold—worthy sons of Judah! But there is none left—not one."

"Ten!" Rachel exclaimed, "and not one remaineth!"

"Aye, and they died as though they were plague-smitten—in pairs and singly, in a little space."

Deborah felt a strong tremor run through the young figure against which she leaned, and the arm across her shoulder was withdrawn, that the hand might clear the eyes of their tears.

The old woman discreetly held her peace till the girl should recover.

"Thou must bear in mind, Rachel," she began, after a long silence, "that Egypt had an especial grudge against thy house,—hence, its especial vengeance.

Seti, the Pharaoh, began the oppression of the children of Israel, but the bondage was not all-embracing, in the beginning. There were Hebrews to whom Egypt was indebted and chief among these was thy father's grandsire, Aram. Seti paid the debt to him by sparing his small lands and his little treasure and himself when he put Israel to toil. Thy father's father, thy grandsire, Elihu, younger brother to Amminadab, who was father-in-law to Aaron, came to his share of his father's goods when Aram was gathered to his fathers. This was in the latter days of Seti. Thy grandsire sent his little treasure into Arabia and bought lands with it. After many trials he caused to grow thereon a rose-shrub which had no period of rest —blooming freshly with every moon. And there he had the Puntish scentmaker on the hip, for the Arabic rose rested often. The attar he distilled from his untiring flower, had another odor, wild and sweet and of a daintier strength. When he was ready to trade he sent in a vial of crystal to Neferari Thermuthis and to Moses, then a young man and a prince of the realm, a few drops of this wondrous perfume. Doubt not, the Hebrew prince knew that the gift came from a son of Israel. The queen and Moses used the attar. Therefore all purple-wearing Egypt must have it or die, since the fashion had been set within the boundaries of the throne. Then did Elihu name a price for his sweet odor that might have been small had each drop been a jewel. But Egypt opened her coffers and bought as though her idols had broken their silence and commanded her."

The old woman paused and reflected with grim satisfaction on the remote days of an Israelitish triumph.

"Meanwhile," she continued finally, "thy grandsire lived humbly in Goshen. None dreamed that this keeper of a little flock, lord over a little tent and tiller of a few acres, was the great Syrian merchant who was despoiling Mizraim.

"Next he became a money-lender, through his steward, to the Egyptians, and wrested from them what they had saved in putting Israel to toil without hire. So his riches increased a hundredfold and the half of noble Egypt was beholden to him. Then he turned to aid his oppressed brethren.

"He bribed the taskmasters or kept watch over them and discovered wherein they were false to the Pharaoh, and held their own sin over their heads till they submitted through fear of him. He filled Israel's fields with cattle, the hills with Hebrew flocks, the valleys with corn. Alas! Had it not been—but, nay, Jehovah was not yet ready. He had chosen Moses to lead Israel."

The old woman paused and sighed. After a silence she continued:

"Thy father fell heir to the most of his wealth, but not to his immunity. With a heart as great as his sire's he continued the good work. He wedded thy mother, the daughter of another free Israelite, and in his love for her, never was man more happy. In the midst of his hope and his peace an enemy betrayed him to Rameses, the Incomparable Pharaoh. And Rameses remembered not his father's covenant. So Maai's lands, his flocks, his home, were taken; thou, but new-born, and thy mother with her people were sent to the brick-fields—himself and his brothers to the

mines; and in a few years thou wast all that was left of thy father's house."

The effect of this recital on the young Israelite was deep. Anguish, wrath, and the pain that intensifies these two, helplessness, inflamed her soul. The story was not entirely new to her; she had heard it, a part at a time, in her childhood; but now, her understanding fully developed, the whole history of her family's wrongs appealed to her in all its actual savagery. Egypt, as a unit, like a single individual, had done her people to death. Between her and Egypt, then, should be bitter enmity, rancor that might never be subdued, and eternal warfare. Her enemy had conquered her, had put her in bondage, and made sport of her as a pastime. The accumulation of injury and insult seemed more than she could bear, and the vague hope of Israel in Moses seemed in the face of Egypt's strength a folly most fatuous.

"O Egypt! Egypt!" she exclaimed with concentrated passion. "What a debt of vengeance Israel owes to thee!"

The old woman laid her shriveled hands on the arm of her ward.

"Aye, and it shall be paid," she said fiercely. "Thou canst not get thy people back, nor alleviate for them now the pangs that killed them; but to the mortally wronged there is one restitution—revenge!"

At this moment some one over near the western limits of the camp cried out a welcome; a commotion arose, noisy with cheers and rapid with running. Presently it died down and the pair before the tent saw a horseman ride through the gloom toward the empty frame house of the overseer.

The two women lapsed immediately into their absorbed communion again.

"Lay it not to Egypt alone, but to all the offenders against Jehovah. Midian and Amalek, passing through to do homage to the Pharaoh, sneer at Israel; Babylon in her chariot of gold flicks her whip at the sons of Abraham as she bears her gifts of sisterhood to Memphis. We suffer not only the insults of a single nation, but despiteful use by all idolaters. Let but the world gather before Jehovah's altar and there shall be no more affronts to Israel."

"Must we bide that time?" Rachel asked. "Or shall we bring it about?"

"Nay," Deborah replied scornfully. "Even my mystic eyes are not potent enough to see so far into the future. We throw off the bondage sooner than thou dreamest, daughter of Judah, but if the nations bow at the altar of Jehovah, it will take a stronger hand than Israel's to bring them there."

After a silence Rachel murmured, as though to herself: "We shall go, and soon, and leave no debt behind. Will the vengeance befall all Egypt, the good as well as the bad?"

"Hast thou forgotten God's promise to Abraham concerning the wicked cities of the plain? If there were ten righteous therein He had not destroyed them utterly."

"Nay, but if there be but one therein?"

"One? Now, for what one dost thou concern thyself? Atsu?"

Rachel, startled out of her dream, hesitated, her face coloring hotly, though unseen, beneath the kindly dusk of night.

"Yea," she said in a low tone, wondering gravely if she spake the truth. Somebody beside her laughed the short unready laugh of one slow at mirth.

"Of a truth?" he asked. Rachel turned about and faced Atsu. He took her hands and drew her near him.

"Nay, Deborah," he said sadly; "pursue her not into the secret chambers of her young heart. I doubt not there is 'one' therein, but why shall we demand what manner of 'one' it is when she may not even confess it to herself?"

Confused and a little guilty by reason of the necklace, and wondering why she admitted any guilt, Rachel drew away from him.

"Nay," he went on, retaining his clasp. "Let there be perfect understanding between us twain, thou Radiant One. I shall not plague thee with my love, nor even let it be apparent after this. Men have lived in constant fellowship, but no nearer to the women whom they love, and am I less able than my kind? So I be not hateful to thee, Rachel, I am content."

"Hateful to me!" she cried reproachfully.

"Nay? No more then. I have spoken the last with thee concerning my love. And thus I seal the pact."

He drew her, unresisting, to him, and kissed her forehead.

"For my gentleness to the Hebrews of Pa-Ramesu," he continued in a calmer tone as he released her, "they have stripped me of my rank and sent me to govern Masaarah. So they thought to punish me, never dreaming that they joined me to Rachel, and hid me away in a nook with a handful to whom I may be mer-

ciful and none will spy upon me! They thwarted their end."

"Happy Masaarah!" Rachel said earnestly.

Atsu laughed again and disappeared in the dark.

Rachel drew her hand furtively across the place on her brow that the taskmaster's lips had touched. The keen eyes of the old Israelite saw the motion and understood it.

"It is not Atsu," she said astutely.

"Nay," the girl protested, "and yet it is Atsu, in mine own meaning, or any one in Egypt who is fair to Israel. The grace of that one would be sufficient in God's sight to save all Egypt from doom. That was my meaning."

The light in the frame quarters of the taskmaster was extinguished and at that moment a shadowy figure emerged from the dark and approached the pair.

"A courier from Mesu speaketh without the camp, even now," the visiting Israelite said in a half-whisper. "Atsu hath put out his light, to sleep, but even if he sleep not, the people may go without fear and listen to the speaker. Come ye and give him audience."

"We come," Deborah replied.

As the old woman and her ward walked down through the night in the direction taken by the entire population of the quarries, Deborah said quietly:

"Thy cloud of depression hath rifted somewhat since sunset, daughter."

Rachel pressed her hand repentantly.

At the side of an open space, now closely filled with sitting listeners, stood a Hebrew, not older than thirty-five. A knot of flaming pitch, stuck in a crevice of rock near him, lighted his face and figure. His

frame had the characteristic stalwart structure of the Israelitish bondman. The black hair waved back from a placid white forehead; the eyes were serene and level, the mouth rather wide but firm, the jaw square. The beard would have been light for a much younger man, and it was soft, red-brown and curling. It added a mildness and tenderness to the face. Whoever looked upon him was impressed with the unflinching piety of the countenance.

This was Caleb the Faithful, son of Jephunneh, the Kenezite.

He was talking when Rachel and her ancient guardian entered the hollow, and he continued in a passive tone throughout the several arrivals thereafter. He spoke as one that believes unfalteringly and has evidence for the faith. He did not recount Israel's wrongs —he would have worked against his purpose had he wrought his hearers into an angry mood. Besides, the story would have been superfluous. None knew Israel's wrongs better than Israel.

He talked of redemption and Canaan.

CHAPTER XI

HEBREW CRAFT

When Mentu returned from On a light had kindled in his eyes and his stately step had grown elastic. The man that withdraws from a busy life while in full vigor has beckoned to Death. Inactivity preys upon him like a disease. The great artist, forced into idleness by the succession of an incapable king, had been renewed by the prospect of labor which his exaltation into the high office had afforded. With pleasure in his heart, Kenkenes watched his father grow young again.

"Who was thy good friend in this?" the young man asked one evening after a number of contented remarks concerning the murket's appointment. "Who said the word in the Pharaoh's ear?"

"So to raise me to this office it is needful that something more than my deserts must have urged the king?" Mentu retorted.

"Nay! that was not my meaning," Kenkenes made haste to say. "But thou knowest, my father, that Meneptah must be for ever directed. Who, then, offered him this wise counsel? Rameses?"

"It was never Har-hat," Mentu replied, but half placated.

"If he had, thou and I must no longer call him a poor counselor."

"Bribe—" the murket began, ruffled once more.

"Nay," Kenkenes interrupted smiling. "He had but proved himself worthy and wise."

Mentu shook his head, but there was no more temper evident in his face.

"Now is a propitious hour for a good counselor," Kenkenes pursued.

"What knowest thou?" Mentu asked with interest.

"Tape," the young man replied briefly.

"Nay, the sedition in Tape is old and vitiated."

"And the Hak-heb."

"That breach may be healed. But we have sedition to fear among the bond-people—"

"The bond-people!"

"Even so. Open and organized sedition."

"The Israelites?" Kenkenes exclaimed with an incredulous note in his voice.

"The Israelites."

"I would sooner fear a rebellion among the draft-oxen and the mules of Nehapehu."*

"The elder Seti's fears and the fears of the great Rameses were other than yours."

"O, aye, they had cause for fear then, but since Seti yoked the creatures—"

"The Pharaohs did not begin in time," the elder man interrupted. "Had that royal fiat, the decimation of Hebrew children, continued, we should not have had the Israelite to-day, but gods!" he shuddered with horror. "I hope that is a horrid slander—tradition,

*The Fayum.

not fact. I like not to lay the slaughter of babes at the door of any Egyptian dynasty. But had an early Pharaoh of the house of Tothmes enforced the absorption of the Hebrew by his same rank among the Egyptian, we should not have the menace of a hostile alien within our borders to-day. The heavy hand of oppression has made a wondrous race of them for strength. Theirs is no mean intellect; great men have come from among them, and they will be a hardy foe arrayed against us."

"They are not warriors; they are poor and unequipped for hostilities; they are thoroughly under subjection," the young man pursued. "What can they do against us?"

"Do!" Mentu exclaimed with impatience in the repetition. "They have only to say to the banished Hyksos: 'Come ye, let us do battle with Egypt. We will be your mercenaries.' They have only to send greeting to that lean traitor Amon-meses, thus: 'Give us the Delta to be ours and we will help you win all Egypt,' and there will be enough done."

"They must have a pact among themselves and a leader, first," Kenkenes objected.

"Have I not said they are organized? And their leader is found. He is a foster-brother to Meneptah; an initiated priest of Isis; a sorcerer and an infidel of the blackest order. He is Prince Mesu, a Hebrew by birth."

"Dost thou know him?" Kenkenes asked with interest.

"Nay, he has dwelt in Midian these forty years. He returned some time ago and hath dwelt passively in Goshen till—"

The artist dropped his voice and came nearer to his son.

"He hath dwelt passively in Goshen till of late, and it is whispered that some secret work against him inaugurated by the priesthood, or mayhap the Pharaoh, hath given him provocation to revolt against Meneptah."

After a silence Kenkenes asked in a lowered tone: "Hath he made demonstration?"

"O, aye, he is clamoring to lead his people a three days' journey into the wilderness to make sacrifice to their god."

"Shades of mine ancestors! If that is all, let them, so they return," Kenkenes said amicably.

"Let them!" the sculptor exploded. "Dost thou believe that they would return?"

"I apprehend that the Rameside army would be capable of thwarting them if they were disposed to depart permanently."

"Thou dost apprehend—aye, of a truth, I know thou dost! Halt all our works of peace for an indefinite time; mass the vast army of the Pharaoh and spend days and good arrows in retrieving the runaways, merely that a barbarian god may smell the savor of holy animals sacrificed! Gods! Kenkenes, thou art as trustworthy a counselor as Har-hat!"

Thereafter there was a silence in the work-room. But a peppery man is seldom sulky, and Kenkenes was fully prepared for the mildness in his father's voice when he spoke again.

"Thou shouldst see the pretense in his demand, Kenkenes. He must have provocation to urge him to

rebellion, and he knows full well that Meneptah will not grant that petition."

"But hath he not provocation—thou hast but a moment ago told—"

"But that was only an offense against *him*. The whole people would not go into revolt because some one had conspired against one of their number. Therefore he telleth Israel that its God would have Israel make a pilgrimage, promising curses upon the people if they obey not. Then he putteth the appeal to the Pharaoh and the Pharaoh denieth it. Wherefore the whole people is enraged and hath rallied to the conspirator's cause. Seest thou, my son?"

"It is strategy worthy the Incomparable Pharaoh—"

"It is Hebrew craft!"

"Perhaps thou art right. But what personal grudge hath Mesu against Egypt or the priesthood or Meneptah?"

"It is said that he was wanted out of the way, and by an unfortunate sum of accidents, the miscarriage of a priest's letter and a fight between a messenger and Bedouins in front of a Hebrew tent, gave the information into the hands of Mesu himself."

By this time Kenkenes was on his feet.

"A miscarriage of a priest's letter," he repeated slowly.

The artist nodded.

After the silence the young man spoke again:

"And thou believest truly that because of this letter —because of this Israelite's grievance against the powers of Egypt, we shall have uprising and serious trouble among our bond-people?"

"I have said," Mentu answered, raising his head as though surprised at the earnestness in his son's voice. Kenkenes did not meet his father's eyes. He turned on his heel and left the work-room.

Had the spiteful Seven, the Hathors, used him as a tool whereby mischief should be wrought between the nation and her slaves?

CHAPTER XII

CANAAN

When the imperative necessity of harmonious expression became apparent, the young artist laid aside his chisel and mallet, and the Arabian desert knew his footsteps no more for many days after the rough-hewing of Athor's face. Instead, he mingled with the people of Memphis in quest of the expression. The pursuit became fascinating and all-absorbing. With the most deliberate calculation, he studied the faces of the betrothed and of newly wedded wives, and finding too much of content therein, he sought out the unelect for study. And with these, his search ended.

Thereafter he made innumerable heads in clay, and covered linen scrolls with drawings. But it was the semblance he gained and not the spirit. The light eluded him.

On the day after Mentu's return from On, Kenkenes paid the first visit to Masaarah since the incident of the collar,—and the last he thought to make until he had won that for which he strove. He went to bury the matting in the sand and to hide other evidences of recent occupancy about the niche. He left the block of stone undisturbed, for the transgression was not yet apparent on the face of Athor. The scrolls, which had been concealed under the carpeting, were

too numerous for his wallet to contain, but he carried the surplus openly in his hand.

It was sunset before he had made an end. To return to the Nile by way of the cliff-front would have saved him time, but there was a boyish wish in his heart to look again on the lovely face that had helped him and baffled him. So he descended into the upper end of the ravine and slowly passed the outskirts of the camp, but the bond-girl was nowhere to be seen. The spaces between the low tents were filled with feeding laborers and there was an unusual amount of cheer to be noted among Israel of Masaarah. Kenkenes heard the talk and laughter with some wonderment as he passed. He admitted that he was disappointed when, without a glimpse of Rachel, he emerged into the Nile valley. But he leaped lightly down the ledge, crossed the belt of rubble, talus and desert sand, and entered the now well-marked wagon road between the dark green meadow land on either side. Egypt was in shadow—her sun behind the Libyan heights,—but the short twilight had not fallen. Overhead were the cooling depths of sky, as yet starless, but the river was breathing on the winds and the sibilant murmur of its waters began to talk above the sounds of the city. To the north, the south and the east was pastoral and desert quiet; to the west was the gradual subsidence of urban stir. Frogs were beginning to croak in the distance, and in the long grain here and there, a nocturnal insect chirred and stilled abruptly as the young man passed.

Within a rod of the pier some one called:

"My master!"

The voice came from a distance, but he knew whom

he should see when he turned. Half-way across the field toward the quarries Rachel was coming, with a scroll in her lifted hand. He began to retrace his steps to meet her, but she noted the action and quickened her rapid walk into running.

"Thou didst drop this outside the camp," she said as she came near. "I feared it might have somewhat pertaining to the statue on it, and I have brought it, with the permission of the taskmaster." She stopped, and putting her hand into the folds of her habit on her breast, hesitated as if for words to speak further. Kenkenes interrupted her with his thanks.

"How thou hast fatigued thyself for me, Rachel! Out of all Egypt I doubt if I might find another so constant guardian of my welfare. The grace of the gods attend thee as faithfully. I thank thee, most gratefully."

The purpose in her face dissolved, the hand that seemed to hold somewhat in the folds of her habit relaxed and fell slowly. While Kenkenes waited for her to speak, he noted that a dress of unbleached linen replaced the coarse cotton surplice she had worn before, and her feet were shod with simple sandals—an extravagance among slaves. But the garb was yet too mean. The sculptor wondered at that moment how the sumptuous attire of the high-born Memphian women would become her. He shook his head and in his imagination dressed her in snow-white robes with but the collar of rings about her throat, and stood back to marvel at his picture of splendid simplicity.

"Hast thou not something more to tell me?" he asked

kindly. "Do thou rest here on the wharf while we talk. Art thou not quite breathless?"

"Nay, I thank thee," she faltered. "I may not linger." The hand once again sought the folds over her breast.

"Then let me walk with thee on thy way. It will be dark soon."

"Nay," she protested flushing, "and again, I thank thee. It is not needful." She made a movement as if to leave him, but he stepped to her side.

"Out upon thee, daughter of Israel, thou art ungracious," he remonstrated laughingly. "I can not think thee so wondrous brave. For it is a long walk to the camp and the night will be pitch-black. Why may I not go with thee?"

"There is naught to be feared."

"Of a truth? Those hills are as full of wild beasts as Amenti is of spirits. And even if no hurt befell thee, the trepidation of that long journey would be cruel. Nay; Ptah, the gallant god, would spurn my next offering, did I send thee back to camp alone. Wilt thou come?"

She bowed and dropped behind him. Her resolution to maintain the forms of different rank between them was not characteristic of other slaves he had known. There was no presumption or humble gratitude in her manner when he would offer her the courtesies of an equal, but he had met the disdain of a peer once when he thought he talked with a slave. There was something mocking in her perfunctory deference, but her pride was genuine. Her conduct seemed to say: "I would liefer be a Hebrew and a

slave than a princess of the God-forgotten realm of Egypt."

The young sculptor was unruffled, however. He was turning over in his mind, with interest, the evidence that tended to show that the Israelite had something more to tell him, that her courage had failed her and that her hand had sought something concealed in her dress. He recalled the former meetings with her and arrived at a surmise so sudden and so conclusive that with difficulty he kept himself from making outward demonstration of his conviction. "The collar, by Apis! I offended her with the trinket. And she came to make me take it back, but her courage fled. Fie upon my clumsy gallantries! I must make amends. I would not have her hate me."

He broke the silence with an old, old remark—one that Adam might have made to Eve.

"Look at the stars, Rachel. There is a dark casement in the heavens—a blink of the eye and the lamp is alight."

"So I watch them every night. But they are swifter here in Memphis. At Mendes, where Israel toiled once, they are more deliberate," she answered readily.

"Aye, but you should see them at Philæ. They ignite and bound into brilliance like sparks of meeting metal and flint. Ah, but the tropics are precipitate!"

"I know them not," she ventured.

"Their acquaintance is better avoided. They have no mean—they leap from extreme to extreme. They are violent, immoderate. It is instant night and instant day; it is the maddest passion of summer always. Nature reigns at the top of her voice and chokes her

realm with the fervor of her maternity. Nay, give me the north. I would feel the earth's pulse now and then without burning my fingers."

"There is room for choice in this land of thine," she mused after a little.

"Land of mine?" he repeated inquiringly, turning his head to look at her. "Is it not also thine?"

"Nay, it is not the Hebrews' and it never was," the clear answer came from the dusk behind him.

"So!" he exclaimed. "After four hundred years in Egypt they have not adopted her!"

"We have but sojourned here a night. The journey's end is farther on."

"Israel hath made a long night of the sojourn," he rejoined laughingly.

"Nay," she answered. "Thou hast not said aright. It is Egypt that hath made a long night of our sojourn."

There was a silence in which Kenkenes felt accused and uncomfortable. It would require little to make harsh the temper of the talk. It lay with him, one of the race of offenders, to make amends.

"It is for me to admit Egypt's sin and ask a truce," he said gently. "So be thou generous to me, since it is I who am abashed in her stead."

Again there was silence, broken at last by the Israelite in a voice grown wondrously contrite.

"I do not reproach thee. Nor, indeed, is all Egypt at fault. The sin lies with the Pharaohs."

"Ah! the gods forbid!" he protested. "Lay it on the shoulders of babes, if thou wilt, but I am party to treason if I but give ear to a rebuke of the monarch."

"I am not ignorant of the law. I shall spare thee, but I have purchased my right to condemn the king."

"Thou indomitable! And I accused thee of fear. I retract. But tell me—what is the journey's end? Is it the ultimate goal of all flesh?"

"Not so," she answered proudly. "It is Israel's inheritance promised for four hundred years. The time is ripe for possession. We go forward to enter into a land of our own."

"Thou givest me news. Come, be the Hebrews' historian and enlighten me. Where lies the land?"

Rachel hesitated. To her it was a serious problem to decide whether the lightness of the sculptor's tone were mockery or good fellowship. Kenkenes noted her silence and spoke again.

"Perchance I ask after a hieratic secret. If so, forgive the blunder."

"Nay," she replied at once. "It is no secret. All Egypt will know of it ere long. God hath prepared us a land wherein we may dwell under no master but Jehovah. We go hence shortly to enter it. The captain of Israel will lead us thither and Jehovah will show him the way. Abraham was informed that it was a wondrous land wherein the olive and the grape will crown the hills; the corn will fill the valleys; the cattle and sheep, the pasture lands. There will be many rivers instead of one and the desert will lie afar off from its confines. The sun will shine and the rain will fall and the winds will blow as man needeth them, and there will be no slavery and no heavy life therein. The land shall be Israel's and its enemies shall crouch without its borders, confounded at the splendor of the

children of God. And there will our princes arise and a throne be set up and a mighty nation established. Cities will shine white and strong-walled on the heights, and caravans of commerce will follow down the broad roadways to the sea. There will the ships of Israel come bowing over the waters with the riches of the world, and our wharves will be crowded with purple and gold and frankincense. Babylon shall do homage on the right hand and Egypt upon the left, and the straight smoke from Jehovah's altar will rise from the center unfailing by day or by night."

They had reached the ledge and Kenkenes sat down on it, leaning on one hand across Rachel's way. She paused near him. Even in the dark he could see the light in her eyes, and the joy of anticipation was in her voice. As yet he did not know whether she talked of the Israelitish conception of supernal life, or of a belief in a temporal redemption.

"And there shall be no death nor any of the world-sorrows therein?" he asked.

"Since we shall dwell in the world we may not escape the world's uncertainties," she replied, looking at his lifted face. "But most men live better lives when they live happily, and I doubt not there will be less unhappiness, provident or fortuitous, in Israel, the nation, than in Israel, enslaved."

So the slave talked of freedom as slaves talk of it—hopefully and eloquently. A pity asserted itself in the young sculptor's heart and grew to such power that it tinctured his speech.

"Is thy heart then so firmly set on this thing?" he asked gently.

"It is the hope that bears Israel's burdens and the balm that heals the welt of the lash."

And in the young man's heart he said it was a vain hope, a happy delusion that might serve to make the harsh bondage endurable till time dispelled it. The simple words of the girl were eloquent portrayal of Israel's plight, and Kenkenes subsided into a sorry state of helpless sympathy. She was not long in interpreting his silence.

"Vain hope, is it?" she said. "And how shall it come to pass in the face of the Pharaoh's denial and the might of Egypt's arms? Thou art young and so am I, but both of us remember Rameses. There has been none like him. He overthrew the world, did he not? And it was a hard task and a precarious and a long one, when he but measured arms with mortals. Is it not a problem worthy the study to ponder how he might have fared in battle with a god?"

Kenkenes lifted his head suddenly and regarded her.

"Aye," she continued, "I have given thee food for thought. Futile indeed were Israel's hopes if it set itself unaided against the Pharaoh. But the God of Israel hath appointed His hour and hath already descended into fellowship with His chosen people. He hath promised to lead us forth, and the Divine respects a promise. So a God against a Pharaoh. Doth it not appear to thee, Egyptian, that there approaches a marvelous time?"

"Give me but faith in the hypothesis and I shall say, of a surety," he replied.

"Thou hast said. Shall we not go on, my master?"

"I am Kenkenes, the son of Mentu," he told her.

She bent her head in acknowledgment of the introduction and moved forward as if to climb up by the projecting edges of the strata. But he put a powerful arm about her and lifted her into the valley. With a light bound he was beside her. Ahead of them was profound darkness, hedged by black and close-drawn walls and canopied by distant and unillumining stars. She resumed her place behind him though he was moved to protest, but her deliberate manner seemed to demand its way. So they continued slowly.

"Thou givest me interest in the God of Israel," he said, to reopen the subject. "The Egyptian dwells in his gods, but thou sayest that the God of Israel dwells in Israel."

"Even so. But thou speakest of Israel's God, even after the fashion of my people. They are jealous, saying that the true God hath but one love and that is Israel. If they would think it, let them, but He is the all-God, of all the earth, the One God—thy God as well as mine."

"Mine!" Kenkenes exclaimed.

"Thou hast said."

"Now, by all things worshipful, this is news. I had ever thought that our gods are those to whom we bow. Either thou sayest wrong or I have been remiss in my devotions."

"Nay, listen," she said earnestly, stepping to his side. "Already have I told thee of the captain of Israel. He was reared among princes in the house of the Pharaoh, and he is learned in all the wisdom of Egypt. He instructeth the elders concerning Jehovah, and from mouth to mouth his wisdom traverseth

till it reacheth the ears of the young. This, then, I have from the lips of Moses, who speaketh naught but the truth. In early times all on earth had perished for wickedness by the sending of the One God, save a holy man and his three sons. These men worshiped the God of Abraham, who was the father of Israel. One of the sons founded thy race, saith Moses, and one established mine. The tribes that went into Egypt worshiped the same God. Lo, is it not written in the early tombs? So Moses testifieth, but if thou doubtest, go question thy historians. And some of the tribes called that God Ra, others, Ptah, and yet others, Amen. But in time they quarreled and each tribe refused to admit the identity of the three-named One God, saying, 'Thy god sendeth plague and affliction, and ours sendeth rich harvests and the Nile floods.' Did not the same God do each of these things in His wisdom? Even so. But when they were at last united into one great people, they had forgotten the quarrel, forgotten that in the beginning they had worshiped one God, and they bowed down to three instead. Nay, if there were but one among you who dared, there are loose threads fluttering, which, if drawn, might unravel the whole fabric of idolatry and disclose that which it hides—the One God—the God of Abraham."

Kenkenes had walked in silence, looking down into the luminous eyes, lost in wonder. Rachel suddenly realized at what length she had talked and stopped abruptly, dropping back to her place again as if chidden.

"Come," said Kenkenes, noting her action, "walk beside me, priestess. I would hear more of this. It is like all forbidden things—wondrously alluring."

"I did forget," she answered stubbornly. "There is nothing more."

Kenkenes stopped.

"Come," he insisted. "The teacher rather precedes the pupil. At least, thou shalt walk beside me."

"I pray thee, let us go on. We are not yet at the camp—we have walked so slowly," she answered. At that moment several fragments of rock, loosening, slid down in the dark just behind her. She caught her breath and was beside the young artist in an instant. He laughed in sheer delight.

"Thou hast assembled the spirits by thy blasphemy," he said. "And remember, I must soon return to this haunted place alone."

"Thou canst get a brand of fire or a cudgel at the camp," she said with some remorse in her voice, "and run for the river bank." With that she resumed her place behind him.

Kenkenes laughed again. It gave him uncommon pleasure to know that his model was concerned for him. He put out his hand and deliberately drew her up to his side. Not content with that he bent his arm and put her hand under it and into his palm, so that she could not leave him again. She submitted reluctantly, but her fingers, lost in his warm clasp, were cold and ill at ease. He felt their chill and released her to slip about her shoulders the light woolen mantle he had worn. Her apprehension lest he take her hand again was so evident that he refrained, though he slackened his step and kept with her.

But she spoke no more until they were beside the outermost circle of coals that had been a cooking fire for the camp. Here they met a man, whom, by his

superior dress, Kenkenes took to be the taskmaster. They were almost upon him before he was seen.

"Rachel!" he exclaimed.

"Here am I," she answered, a little anxiously.

"Thou wast gone long—" he began.

The sculptor interposed.

"She hath done me a service and it was my pleasure to talk with her," he said complacently. "Chide her not."

The glow from the fire lighted the young man's face, and the taskmaster, standing in deep shadow, scanned it sharply but did not answer. Kenkenes turned and strode away down the valley.

Rachel snatched a thick sycamore club which had been left over in the construction of the scaffold and ran after him. But the young sculptor had disappeared in the dark.

"Kenkenes," she cried at last desperately. He answered immediately.

She slipped off the mantle.

"This, thy mantle," she said when he approached, "and this," thrusting the club into his hands. "There is as much danger in the valley for thee as for me." And like a shadow she was gone.

As he hurried on again through the dense gloom of the ravine, the young man thought long on the Israelite and her words. She had offered him theories that peremptorily contradicted the accepted idea among Egyptians, that Moses was inspired by a personal motive of revenge. The argument put forth by his father began to show sundry weaknesses. Furthermore Rachel's version gave him a much coveted opportunity to slip from his shoulders the discomfort-

ing blame that had rested there since he had heard that a miscarried letter might effect a national disturbance. Much as the practical side of his nature sought to decry the great Hebrew's motive, a sense of relief possessed him.

"I fear me, Kenkenes, thou durst not boast thyself an embroiler of nations," he said to himself. "The Hebrew prince is a zealot, and zealots have no fear for their lives. Truly those Israelites are an uncommon and a proud people. But, by Besa, is she not beautiful!"

He enlarged on this latter thought at such exhaustive length that he had traversed the valley and field, found his boat, crossed the Nile and was at home before he had made an end.

CHAPTER XIII

THE COMING OF THE PHARAOH

On the first day of February, runners, dusty, breathless and excited, passed the sentries of the Memphian palace of Meneptah with the news that the Pharaoh was but a day's journey from his capital. They were the last of a series of couriers that had kept the city informed of the king's advance. For days before, public drapers were to be seen clinging cross-legged to obelisk and peristyle; moving in spread-eagle fashion, hung in a jacket of sail-cloth attached to cables, across the fronts of buildings, looping garlands, besticking banners and spreading tapestries. Scattering sounds of hammer and saw continued even through the night. The city's metals were polished, her streets were sprinkled and rolled, her stone wharves scoured, her landings painted, her flambeaux new-soaked in pitch. The gardens, the storehouses and the wine-lofts felt unusual draft for the festivities, and the great capital was decked and scented like a bride.

Now, on the eve of the Pharaoh's coming, the preparations were complete. The city was full of excitement and pleasant expectancy. Only once before during the six years of Meneptah's reign had such enthusiasm prevailed. When the Rebu horde descended upon Egypt, Meneptah had sent his generals

out to meet the invader, but he, himself, had remained under cover in Memphis because he said the stars were unpropitious. And this was the son of Rameses II, than whom, if the historians and the singer Pentaur say true, there was never a more puissant monarch! But when the marauder was overthrown and routed, and his generals turned toward Memphis with their captives in chains, Meneptah hastened to meet them, decked his chariot with war trophies and entered his capital in triumph. He was hailed with exultant acclaim.

"Hail, mighty Pharaoh! who smites with his glance and annihilates with his spear. He overthrew companies alone, and with his lions he routed armies. His enemies crumbled before him like men of clay, for he breathed hot coals in his wrath and flames in his vengeance." And the enthusiasm that inspired the eulogy was sincere. Meneptah was none the less loved because Memphis understood him. The Pharaoh was the apple of her eye and she worshiped him stubbornly.

Now he was returning from a bloodless campaign—one that neither required nor brought forth any generalship—but it was a victory and had been personally conducted by Meneptah, so Memphis was preparing to fall into paroxysms of delight, little short of hysteria.

An hour after sunrise on the day of the Pharaoh's coming a gorgeous regatta assembled off the wharves of Memphis. It was a flotilla of the rank and wealth of the capital, with that of On, Bubastis, Busiris, and even Mendes and Tanis. The boats were high-riding, graceful and finished at head and stern with sheaves

of carved lotus. Hull and superstructure were painted in gorgeous colors with a preponderance of ivory and gold. Masts, rigging and oars were wrapped with lotus, roses and mimosa. Sails and canopies were brilliant with dyes and undulant with fringes. Troops of tiny boys, innocent of raiment, were posted about the sides of the vessels holding festoons. Oarsmen wore chaplets on the head or garlands around the loins, and half-clad slave-girls were scattered about with fans of dyed plumes. Bridges of boats had been hastily run out between the vessels, and over these the embarking voyagers or visitors passed in a stream. On shore was a great multitude and every advantageous point of survey was occupied. And here were catastrophes and riots, panics and love-making, gambling and gossip and all the other things that mark the assembly of a crowd. But these incidents drew the attention of the populace only momentarily from the revel of the nobility on the Nile. For there were laughter and songs, strumming of the lyre, shouts, polite contention and the drone of general conversation among such numbers that the sound was of great volume.

At the head of the pageant were the boats of the nomarch and the courtiers to Meneptah who remained in Memphis. Near the forefront of these was the pleasure-boat of Mentu.

Kenkenes dropped from its deck to the walk rising and falling at its side, and made his way through the crowd in search of a vessel bearing a winged sun and the oval containing the symbols of On. As he passed the prow of a tall pleasure-boat he was caught in a rope of flowers let down from above and looped

about him with a dexterous hand. He turned in the pretty fetters and looked up. Above him was a row of a dozen little girl-faces, set like apple-blossoms along the side of the vessel. The youngest was not over twelve years of age, the oldest, fourteen. Each rosy countenance was rippled with laughter, but the sound was lost in the great turmoil about them. In the center of the group, a pair of hands put forth under the chin of an older girl, held the ends of the garland with a determined grip. Her eyes were gray, her hair was chestnut, her face very fair. Kenkenes recognized her with a sudden warmth about his heart. The others were strangers to him. A glance at the plate on the side of the boat showed him that this was the one he sought. Most willingly he obeyed the insistent summons of the garland and permitted himself to be drawn to the barge. There, the same hands showed him the ladder against the side, and a dozen pretty arms were extended to haul him aboard as he climbed.

But the instant he planted foot on the deck the lovely rout retreated to shelter at the side of a smiling woman seated in the shadow of fans. Only his fair-faced captor stood her ground.

"Hail, Hapi,"* she cried, doing obeisance. "Pity the desert." She flung wide her hands. With the exception of the youths at the oars there was no other man on the boat.

"Ye may call me forth," Kenkenes replied, "but how shall ye return me to my banks? Hither, sweet On," he continued, catching the hand of the fair-faced girl, "submit first to submergence." She took his kisses

*The inundation, more properly Nilus—the river-god.

willingly. "This for Seti, thy lover; this for Hotep, thy brother, and this for me who am both in one. How thou art grown, Io!"

"But she hath not denied thee the babyhood privileges for all that, Kenkenes," the smiling woman said.

"It is an excellent example of submission she hath set, Lady Senci," he replied, advancing toward the young girls about her. "Let us see if it prevail."

But the troop scattered with little cries of dismay.

"Nay," he observed, as he bent over Senci's hand, "never were two maids alike, and I shall not strive to make them so."

"Thy father hath most graciously kept his word in sending us a protector," Senci continued. "My nosegay of beauties drooped last night when they arrived from On with my brother sick, aboard. They feared they must stop with me in Memphis for want of a man."

"It was the first word I heard from my father this morning and the last when I left him even now: 'Io's father hath failed her through sickness, so do thou look after the Lady Senci—and the gods give thee grace for once to do a thing well!'"

The lady smiled and patted his arm. "He did not fear; he knew whom he chose. But behold our gallant escort—the nomarch ahead, beside us the new cupbearer and behind us all the rank of the north."

"Aye, and when we cast off thou mayest look for the new murket on thy right."

The lady blushed. "I have not seen thy father yet, this morning."

"So? His robes must fit poorly."

At that moment a gang-plank was run across from

the broad flat stern of the nomarch's boat to the prow of Senci's, a carpet was spread on it, and Ta-meri, with little shrieks and tottering steps, came across it. Kenkenes put out his arms to her and lifted her down when she arrived.

"Wonder brought me," she cried. "I dreamed I saw thee kiss a maiden thrice and I came to see if it were true."

"O most honest vision! It is true and this is she," Kenkenes answered, indicating Io.

Ta-meri flung up her hands and gazed at the blushing girl with wide eyes.

"Enough," she said at last. "It is indeed a marvel. Never have I seen such a thing before, and never shall I see it again."

"And if that be true, fie and for shame, Kenkenes," Senci chid laughingly.

"Ta-meri always shuts her eyes," the sculptor defended himself stoutly. The nomarch's daughter caught his meaning first and covered her face with her hands. The chorus of laughter did not drown her protests.

"Kenkenes, thou art a mortal plague!" she exclaimed behind her defense.

"Truce," he said. "Thou didst accuse me and I did defend myself. We are even."

"Nay, but am I also even with Ta-meri?" Io asked shyly.

"Now," Senci cried, "which of ye will say 'aye' or 'nay' to that!"

Ta-meri retreated protesting to the prow again, but the gang-plank had been withdrawn. An army of slaves were breaking up the bridges of boats. The

oars of the nomarch's barge rose and fell and the vessel bore away. Ta-meri cried out again when she saw it depart but she made no effort to stay it.

"Come back, Ta-meri," Io called. "I shall not press thee for an accounting."

The lanes of water between the boats cleared, the scented sails filled, the bristling fringes of oars dipped and flashed, a great shout arose from the populace on shore and the shining pageant moved away toward Thebes. The barge of Nechutes swung into position on the left of Senci—the oars on Mentu's boat rose and halted and the vessel drifted till it was alongside her right. Kenkenes put his arm about Io, who stood beside him and whispered exultantly or irreverently concerning the vigilance of the cup-bearer and the murket.

"And," he continued oracularly, "there will be a third attending us when we return, if thou hast been coy with the gentle Seti during his long absence."

"Nay, I have sent him messages faithfully and in no little point have I failed him in constancy. But I can not see why he should love me, who am to the court-ladies as a thrush to peafowls. He writes me such praise of Ta-user."

"Now, Io! Art thou so little versed in the ways of men that thou dost wonder why we love or how we love or whom we love? The very fact that thou art different from Seti's surroundings is like to make him love thee best."

"I am not jealous; only he hath so much to tell of Ta-user."

"Aye, since she is like to become his sister, it is not strange. But what says he of her?"

Io thrust her hand into the mist of gauzes over her bosom and with a soft flush on her cheeks drew forth a small, flattened roll of linen. Kenkenes made a place for her on his chair and drew her down beside him. Together the pair undid the scroll and Kenkenes, following the tiny pink finger, came upon these words:

"Ah, thou shouldst see her, my sweet. Thou knowest she was born of a prince of Egypt and a lovely Tahennu, and the mingling of our dusky blood with that of a fair-haired northern people, hath wrought a marvelous beauty in Ta-user. Her hair is like copper and like copper her eyes. There is no brownness nor any flush in her skin. It is like thick cream, smooth, soft and cool. And when she walks, she minds me of my grandsire's leopardess, which once did stride from shadow to shadow in the palace with that undulatory, unearthly grace. In nature, she is world-compelling. When first she met me, she took my face between her palms and gazed into mine eyes. Ai! she bewitched me, then and there. My individuality died within me—I felt an unreasoning submission, strangely mingled with aversion. I was compelled—divorced from mine own forces, which vaguely protested from afar. . . . And yet, thou shouldst see her meet Rameses. He makes me marvel. He knows—she knows—aye, all Egypt knows why she hath come to court, and yet they meet—she salutes him with bewildering grace—he inclines his proud head with never a tremor and they pass. Or, if they tarry to talk, it is an awesome sight to see the determined encounter of two mighty souls—tremendous charm against tremendous resistance—and Io, I know that they have sounded to the deepest the depth of each other's

strength. I long to see Ta-user conquer—and yet, again I would not."

Thereafter followed matters which Kenkenes did not read. He rolled the letter and gave it back to Io. The little girl sat expectantly watching his face.

"Nay, I would not take Seti's boyish transports seriously," he said gently. "His very frankness disclaims any heart interest in Ta-user. Besides, she is as old as I—three whole Nile-floods older than the prince. She thinks on him as Senci looks on me—he regards her as a lad looks up to gracious womanhood. Nay, fret not, thou dear jealous child."

Io's lips quivered as she looked away.

"It is over and over—ever the same in every letter—Ta-user, Ta-user, till I hate the name," she said at last.

"Then when thou seest him at midday up the Nile, be thou gracious to some other comely young nobleman and see him wince. Naught is so good for a lover as uncertainty. It is a mistake to load him with the great weight of thy love. Doubt not, thou shalt carry all the burden of jealousy and pain if thou dost. Divide this latter with him, and he shall be content to share more of the first with thee. But thou hast condemned him without trial, Io. Spare thy heart the hurt and wait."

The young face cleared and with a little sigh she settled back in the chair and said no more.

It was noon when the royal flotilla was sighted. There were nineteen barges approaching in the form of two crescents like a parenthesis, the horns up and down the Nile, and in the center of the inclosed space was Meneptah's float. Here was only the royal family,

the king, queen, Ta-user, and the two princes, who took the place of fan-bearers in attendance on their father. The vessel was manned by two reliefs of twelve oarsmen from Theban nobility.

If magnificence came to conduct Meneptah, it met splendor as its charge. The pastoral solitude of the Middle country was routed for the moment by an assemblage of the brilliance and power of all Egypt.

With a shout that made the remote hills reply again and again, the convoy divided, a half retreating to either side of the Nile and the home-coming fleet entered the hollow. The nomarch's boat detached itself from its following and took up a position in the center, beside the royal barge. The advance was delayed only long enough for the escort to turn, take in the sails—for they went against the wind now—and form an outer parenthesis. Then with another shout the triumphant return began.

The other fleet absorbed the attention of each voyager. Every barge had a new-comer alongside and near enough to talk across the water. Therefore a great babel and confusion arose in which rational conversation became impossible. Then vessels essayed to approach nearer one another and the formation began to break. The right oars of one boat and the left of another would be withdrawn and the vessels lashed together. Then they were permitted to drift, with some poling to keep them in the proper direction. When this proceeding was impracticable because of the construction of the barges, one boat would take another in tow until the occupants of one had joined those of the other by a gang-plank laid from prow to stern. By sunset the merrymaking had developed into indis-

criminate boarding. Only the vessels of the king and the nomarch and the barge of Senci were not involved in the uproarious revel that followed. The fates were amiable and no mishaps occurred in spite of the recklessness of the pastime. Men and women alike took part in the play, and the general temper of the merry-makers was good-natured and innocent.

The dusk fell and the shadows of night were made seductive by the dim lamps that began to burn from mast-top and prow. On the barge of Senci only a single and subdued light was swung from a bronze tripod in the bow, and the fourteen charges of the young sculptor, wearied with the long day's excitement, were disposed in graceful abandon under its glow. Senci sat with Ta-meri's head in her lap, and three or four drowsy little girls were tumbled about her feet. Only Io was wide awake, and even her sweet face wore a pensive air. Kenkenes had retired to the stern, where, under the high up-standing end, stood a long wooden bench. The young sculptor had flung himself on this, and with the whole of the boat and its freight within range of his vision, he listened to the riot about him.

Suddenly the sound of cautiously wielded oars attracted his attention. In the end of the boat was a hawser-hole, painted and shaped like the eye of Osiris. Kenkenes turned about on his couch and watched through this aperture.

A barge, judiciously darkened, emerged into the circle of faint radiance about Senci's boat. There were probably a dozen Theban nobles of various ages grouped in attitudes of hushed expectancy in the bow. One robust peer, with a boat-hook in his hand, leaned

over the prow. Another, barely older than fourteen, had mounted the side of the boat, and steadying himself by the shoulder of a young lord, gazed ahead at the group in the bow of Senci's boat.

"By the horns of Isis," he whispered in disgust, "the most of them are babes!"

The robust noble turned his head and jeered good-naturedly under his breath.

"Mark the infant sneering at the buds. But be of cheer. One is there, ripe enough to sate your green appetite."

"Nay! do you distribute them now? Let me make my choice, then."

But a general chorus of whispered protests arose.

"Hold, not so fast. The fan-bearer first. 'Twas he who hit upon the plan."

The nose of the pursuing boat crept alongside the stern of the one pursued, and the oars rested in obedience to a whispered order. The diagonal current which moved out from the Arabian shore, and the backward wash of water from the oars of the forward boat, heaved the head of the nobles' barge toward its object. The robust courtier leaned forward and made fast to his captive with the hook. A sigh of approval and excitement ran through the group.

"Gods! how they will scatter!" the young lord tittered nervously.

"Nay, now, there must be no such thing," the robust noble said, addressing them all. "Mind you, we but come as guests. It shall be left to the ladies to say how we shall abide with them. Show me a light."

The instant brilliance that followed proved that a hood had been lifted from a lamp. One of the men

held a cloak between it and the group on Senci's boat. Kenkenes raised himself. The lamp discovered to his angry eyes the face of Har-hat.

"Now, hold this hook for me while I get aboard," the fan-bearer chuckled.

With a single step the young sculptor crossed to the side of the barge and wrenched the hook from the hands of the man that held it. For a moment he poised it above him, struggling with a mighty desire to bring it down on the head of the startled fan-bearer. The youthful lord dropped from his point of vantage and half of the group retreated precipitately. Har-hat drew back slowly and raised himself, as Kenkenes lowered the weapon. For a space the two regarded each other savagely. The contemplation endured only the smallest part of a moment, but it was eloquent of the bitterest mutual antagonism. There was no relaxing in the rigid lines of the young sculptor's figure, but the fan-bearer recovered himself immediately.

"Forestalled!" he laughed. "Retreat! We would not steal another man's bliss though it be fourteen times his share!"

The oars fell and the boat darted back into the night, the affable sound of Har-hat's raillery receding into silence with it.

Kenkenes flung the boat-hook into the Nile and returned to his bench, puzzled at the inordinate passion of hate in his heart for the fan-bearer.

At the end of the first watch the flotilla drifted into Memphis. Bonfires so vast as to suggest conflagrations made the long water-front as brilliant as day. Far up the slope toward the city the red light discovered a great multitude, densely packed and cheering tu-

multuously. Amid the uproar one by one the barges approached and discharged their occupants along the wharves. Soldiery in companies drove a roadway through the mass from time to time, by which the arrivals might enter Memphis, though few of these departed at once. When the Lady Senci's barge drew up, Mentu forced his way through the increasing crowd to meet and assist its occupants to alight. Kenkenes, still on deck, was handing his charges down the stairway one by one, when he saw Io, who stood at the very end of the line, lean over the side, her face aglow with joy. Kenkenes guessed the cause of her delight and, deserting his post, went to her side. Below stood Seti, on tiptoe, his hands upstretched against the tall hull.

"O, I can not reach thee," he was crying.

Kenkenes caught up the trembling, blushing, repentant girl and lowered her plump into the prince's eager arms.

When Kenkenes saw her an hour later, he lifted her out of her curricle before the portals of Senci's house.

"What did I tell thee?" he said softly.

But the little girl clung to his arms and leaned against him with a sob.

"O Kenkenes," she whispered, "he came but to drag me away to look upon her!"

"Didst go?" he asked.

"Nay," she answered fiercely.

After a silence Kenkenes spoke again:

"He does not love her, Io. Believe me. I doubt not the sorceress hath bewitched him, but he would not rush after a whilom sweetheart to have her look upon a new one. Rather would he strive to cover up

his faithlessness. But he hath been untrue to thee in this—that he shares a thought with the witch when his whole mind should be full of thee. Bide thy time till he emerges from the spell, then make him writhe. Meantime, save thy tears. Never was a man worth one of them."

He kissed her again and set her inside Senci's house.

But one remained now of the procession he had escorted from the river. This was the Lady Ta-meri's litter, and his own chariot stood ahead of it. She had lifted the curtains and was piling the opposite seat with cushions in a manner unmistakably inviting. He hesitated a moment. Should he dismiss his charioteer and journey to the nomarch's mansion in the companionable luxury of the litter? But even while he debated with himself, he passed her with a soft word and stepped into his chariot.

CHAPTER XIV

THE MARGIN OF THE NILE

Meneptah having come and the old régime of life resumed, Memphis subsided into her normal state of dignity. Mentu remained in his house preparing for his investiture with the office of murket. His hours were spent in study, and the coming and going of Kenkenes crossed his consciousness as swiftly as the shadows wavered under his young palms. His son might work for hours near him on mysterious drawings, but so deep was the great artist in the writings of the old murkets that he did not think to ask him what he did. It might not have won his attention even had he seen the young man burn the sheets of papyrus thereafter, and grow restless and dissatisfied. He remarked, however, that Kenkenes was absent during the noon-meal, but when the sundown repast was served and the young man was in his place, Mentu had forgotten that he had not been there at midday.

Kenkenes had visited his niche in the Arabian desert. On his way to the statue he came to the line of rocks where he had hidden himself to get Athor's likeness, and looked down into the quarry opposite him. He was astonished to see at the ledge, just below, a great water-cart with three humped oxen attached. The water-bearers were grouped about it and a Hebrew

youth was drawing off the water in skins and jars. The children received their burdens from his hands and passed up the wooden incline to the scaffold. There Kenkenes saw that the incline had been extended to the level of the platform, and the children were able to deliver the hides directly into the hands of the laborers. Then it occurred to Kenkenes that there was not a woman in sight about the quarries. While he wondered, Rachel emerged from the windings of the valley into the open space below.

She carried a band of linen and a small box of horn in her hand. When the young bearers saw her, one of them, who had been rubbing his eye, came to her. She set her box upon an outstanding edge of stone and devoted herself to him. Drawing his head back until it rested against her bosom, with tender hands she dressed the injured optic with balm from the box.

Kenkenes from his aery watched her, noting with a softening countenance the almost maternal love that beautified her face. Now and then she spoke soothingly as the boy flinched, but her words were so softly said that the sculptor did not catch them. The eye dressed, she covered it with the bandage and the pair separated. It was with some regret that Kenkenes saw her turn to leave the spot. But at that moment the taskmaster rode into the open space. She made a sign of salutation and paused at a word from him. Kenkenes fancied that her face had sobered and he looked down on the cowled head and shoulders of the overseer, wrathfully wondering if the Egyptian had played the master so harshly that Rachel dreaded him. Presently the man dismounted; and though his back was turned toward Kenkenes, the young sculptor

knew by his stature that he was not the soldier who had first governed the quarries. The young man watched him excitedly but there was no display of tyranny or even authority in the taskmaster's manner. They talked, and by the motion of the man's hand Kenkenes fancied that he described something growing near the Nile. Presently they walked together toward the outlet of the valley. The taskmaster leaped down the ledge and, turning, put up his arms and lifted Rachel down. It was plain that something more than courtesy inspired the act, for the man's hands fell reluctantly. Kenkenes faced sharply about and proceeded up the hill to his statue with a queer discomfort tugging at his heart.

That night in his effort to bring forth the coveted expression in his drawings of Athor, Kenkenes all but satisfied himself.

The next day, without any apparent cause, he went back to the niche in the desert, stayed without purpose, and departed when no tangible reason urged him. When the day declined he climbed down the front of the hill and crossed the narrow field toward his boat, which was buried in the rank vegetation of the water's edge. At the Nile he noted, a little distance up the river, a familiar figure among the reeds. For a moment he hesitated and then rambled through the riotous growth in that direction. As he drew near, Rachel raised herself from a search in a thicket of herbs, her arms full of them and her face a little flushed.

"Idler!" said Kenkenes.

"Nay," she answered with a smile, "I am at work—learned work."

"Gathering witch-weeds for an incantation, sorceress?"

"Not so. I am hunting herbs to make simples for the sick."

"Of a truth? Then never before now have I craved for an illness that I might select my leech."

Again she smiled and made a sheaf of the herbs, preparatory to binding it. The bundle was unruly, and several of the plants dropped. She bent to pick them up and others fell. Kenkenes came to her rescue and gathered them all into his large grasp.

"Now, while I hold it," he suggested.

With the most gracious self-possession she smoothed out the fiber, put it twice, thrice about the sheaf and knotted it, her fingers, cool and moist after their contact with the marsh sedge, touching the sculptor's more than once.

"There! I thank thee."

"Are there any sick in the camp?"

"Only those who have been blinded by the stone-dust. But I prepare for sickness during health."

"A wise provision. Would we might prepare for sorrow during contentment."

"We may lay up comfort for us against the coming of misfortune."

"How?"

"In choosing friends," she answered.

His mind went back to the scene of that morning. Did she speak of the taskmaster?

"Thou hast found it so?" he asked.

"Thou hast said." She added no more, though the sculptor was eager for an example.

"How goes it with the statue?" she asked, seeing that he did not move out of her path.

"Slowly," he answered. "But it shall hasten to completeness when I once begin."

"What wilt thou do with it when it is done? Destroy it?"

He shook his head with a smile.

"Leave it there to betray thee to the vengeance of the priesthood one day?"

"I have no fear of discovery."

"Nay, but fear or unfear never yet warded off misfortune," she said gravely. "It is better to entertain causeless concern than unwise confidence."

He eagerly accepted this establishment of equality between them, and overshot his mark.

"Advise me, Rachel. What should I do?"

She gazed at him for a moment distrustfully, wondering if he mocked her and asking herself if she had not deserved it in assuming comradeship with him.

"Nay, it is not my place, my master," she said. "I did forget."

He put his hand on hers with considerable determination in his manner.

"Let us make an end to this eternal emphasis of different rank. I would forget it, Rachel. Wilt thou not permit me? I am thy friend and nothing harsher —above all things, not thy master."

Never before had he spoken so to her. She ventured to look at him at last. His face was grave and a little passionate and his eyes demanded an answer.

"Aye, I shall gladly be thy friend," she answered; "but never hast thou been so much of a master as in the

denial that thou art." The first gleam of girlish mischief danced in her blue eyes. The young sculptor noted it with gladness. He took the free hand and pressed it, and when she turned toward the roadway through the wheat he turned with her and hand in hand they went. As they neared it he spoke again.

"Again would I ask, when wilt thou advise me concerning the statue? Here is my boat. Let us turn it into a high seat of council and I will sit at thy feet and learn."

"Nay, if I sit I shall linger too long, and there is a taskmaster—albeit a gentle one—waiting with other things for me to do."

Kenkenes kicked the turf and frowned.

"It sounds barbarous—this talk of master upon thy lips, Rachel. Thou art out of thy place," he answered.

"I am no more worthy of freedom than my people," she replied with dignity.

"Thy people! They should be lawgivers and advisers among Egypt's high places, rather than brickmakers and quarry-slaves, if thou art a typical Israelite."

"Aye!" she exclaimed, "and thou hast given tongue to the same estimate of Israel, which hath wrought consternation among the powers of Mizraim. And for that reason are we enslaved. Think of it, thou who art unafraid to think. Think of a people in bondage because of its numbers, its sturdiness and its wisdom. Thou who art in rebellion against ancient law dost feel somewhat of Israel's hurt. Behold, am I not also oppressed because I may think to the upsetting of idolatry and the overthrow of mine oppressors? Thou

and I are fellows in bondage; but mark me! I am nearer freedom than thou. The Pharaohs began too late. Ye may not dam the Nile at flood-tide."

Her face was full of triumph and her voice of prophecy. She seemed to declare with authority the freedom of her people. Kenkenes did not speak immediately. His thoughts were undergoing a change. The pity he had felt that night a month agone for her sanguine anticipation of freedom seemed useless and wasted. Her confidence was no longer fatuous. He admitted in entirety the truth of her last words. If all Israel—nay, if but part, if but its leaders were as able and determined as she, did Meneptah guess his peril? Was not Egypt most ominously menaced? He remembered that he had been amused at his father's perturbation over the Israelitish unrest, but he vindicated Mentu then and there. Furthermore, if all Israel were like unto her, what heinous injustice had been perpetrated upon an able people? He found himself hoping that they would assert themselves and enter freedom, whether it be in Canaan or in Egypt.

"If ever Israel come to her own," he said impulsively, "I pray thee, Rachel, remember me to her powers as her partizan in her darker days. And take this into account when thou comest to judge Egypt. The half of the nation know not thy people, even as I have been ignorant; and Osiris pity the hand that would oppress them if all Egypt is made acquainted with them as I have been in these past days. Art thou indeed typical of thy race?"

"Hast thou not been among us often enough to discover?" she parried smilingly.

He shook his head. "Nay, I have known but one

Israelite, and she keeps me perpetually aghast at Egypt."

Rachel's eyes fell.

"We did speak of the statue," she began.

"O, aye! I meant to tell thee how I had fortified myself against mischance. I can not break up the statue; sooner would I assail sweet flesh with a sledge; but when it is done I shall bury it in the sands. It will wrench me sorely to do even that. During the carving I feel most secure, for Memphis and Masaarah think I come hither to look after the removal of stones, since I am a sculptor. But if an Egyptian should come upon it by mischance before it is complete, I have left no trace of myself upon it. Most of all I trust to the generosity of the Hathors, who have abetted me so openly thus far."

Rachel heard him thoughtfully.

"What a pity it is that thou must follow after the pattern of God and sate thy love of beauty by stealth under ban and in fear. Till what time Mizraim sets this law of sculpture aside she may not boast her wisdom flawless. It is past understanding why she exacts obedience to this law most diligently, which fathers these ill-favored images of her gods, when their habitations are most splendidly and most beautifully built. She robeth herself in fine linen, decketh herself with jewels, anointeth her hair and maketh her eyes lovely with kohl, and lo! when she would picture herself she setteth her shoulders awry and slighteth the grace of her joints and the softness of her flesh. O, that thy brave spirit had arisen long ago, ere the perversion had become a heritage, dear to the Egyptian sculptor as his bones! But now, artist though he be,

his eye is so befilmed by ancient use that he sees no monstrousness in his work. So thou hast nation-wide, nation-old, nation-defended custom to fight. And alas! thou art but one, Kenkenes, and I fear for thee."

For once the young sculptor's ready speech failed him. He drew near her, his eyes shining, his lips parted, drinking every word as if it were authoritative privilege for him to indulge his love of beauty without limit and openly. Here was that which he had sought in vain from those nearest to him—that which he had ceased to believe was to be found in Egypt—comfort, sympathy, perfect understanding. What if it came from the lips of an hereditary slave of the Pharaoh—a toiler in the quarries, an infidel, an alien nomad? If an alien, a slave, an unbeliever thought so deeply, felt so acutely and responded so discerningly to such delicate requirements—the slave, the nomad for him!

"Rachel," he began almost helplessly, "I am beyond extrication in debt to thee—thou golden, thou undecipherable mystery!"

She flushed to her very brows and her eyes fell quickly.

"I have appealed to all sources from which I might justly expect sympathy—to men of reason, of power, of mine own kin, and to women of heart—and not once have I found in them the broad and kindly understanding which thou hast displayed for me out of the goodness of thy beautiful heart. Behold! thou hast given speech to my own hidden longings, summarized my difficulties, foreshadowed my misfortunes, deplored them—aye, of a truth, heaved my very sighs for me!" His voice fell and grew reverent. "I would call thee an immortal, but there is a better title

for thee—woman—a true woman—and thou dost even uplift the name."

For the first time in the history of their acquaintance she laughed, not mirthfully, but low and very happily, and the fleeting glimpse she gave him of her eyes showed them radiant and glad. He caught her hands, the bundle of herbs fell, and drawing her near him, he lifted the pink palms to his lips and pressed them there.

"Nay," she said, recovering herself and withdrawing her hands, "I am not an Egyptian but a Hebrew, unbiased by the prejudices of thy nation. It is not strange that I can understand thy rebellion, which is but a rift in thine Egyptian make-up through which reason shows. Any alien could comfort thee as well."

"And thou hast no more sympathy for me than any alien would have?" he asked, somewhat piqued.

"Is there any other sympathizing alien with whom I may compare and learn?" she asked with a smile.

She took up her bundle of herbs again and seemed to be preparing to leave him.

"How dost thou know these things," he asked hurriedly; "all these things—sculpture, religion, history?"

"I was not born a slave," she answered simply.

"Nay, cast out that word. I would never hear thee speak it, Rachel."

"Then, I was born out of servitude. My great grandsire was exempted by Seti when Israel went into bondage. His children and all his house were given to profit by the covenant. But the name grew wealthy and powerful to the third generation. My father was Maai the Compassionate, who loved his brethren better than himself. Them he helped. Rameses the Great forgot his father's promise when he found he

had need of my father's treasure—" she paused and continued as if the recital hurt her. "There were ten —four of my mother's house, six of my father's. To the mines and the brick-fields they were sent, and in a little space I was all that was left."

Horrified and conscience-stricken, Kenkenes made as if to speak, but she went on hurriedly.

"My mother's nurse, Deborah, who went with us into servitude, is learned, having been taught by my mother, and I have been her pupil."

"And there is not one of thy blood—not one guardian kinsman left to thee?" Kenkenes asked slowly.

"Not one."

Up to this moment, during every interview with Rachel, Kenkenes had forsworn some little prejudice, or sacrificed some of his blithe self-esteem. But the tragic narrative swept all these supports from him and left him solitary to face the charge of indirect complicity in murder. He was an Egyptian—a loyal supporter of the government and its policies; he had profited by Israel's toil, and if he succeeded to his father's office, Israel would serve him directly in his labor for the Pharaoh to be. He had known that Israel was oppressed, that Israel died of hard labor, and he had pitied it, as the humane soul in him had felt for the overworked draft-oxen or the sacrifices that were led bleating to the altars. Perhaps he had even casually decried the policy that sent women into the brick-fields and did men to death in a year in the mines. But his own conscience had not been hurt, nor had he taken the misdeed home to himself.

Now his sensations were vastly different. He felt all the guilt of his nation, and he had nothing to offer

as amends but his own humiliation. Of this he had an overwhelming plenitude and his eloquent face showed it. With an effort he raised his head and spoke.

"Rachel, if my humiliation will satisfy thee even a little as vengeance upon Egypt, do thou shame me into the dust if thou wilt."

"I do not understand thee," she said with dignity.

"Believe me. I would help thee in some wise, and alas! there is no other way by deed or word that I could prove my sorrow."

Tears leaped into her eyes.

"Nay! Nay!" she exclaimed. "Thou dost wrong me, Kenkenes. What wickedness were mine to make the one contrite, guiltless heart in Egypt suffer for all the unrepentant and the wrong-doers of the land!"

Once again he took her hand and kissed it, because the act was more eloquent than words at that moment.

"It is near sunset," she said softly, "give me leave to depart."

"Farewell, and the divine Mother attend thee."

She bowed and left him.

That night in the dim work-room Kenkenes brought forth upon papyrus a face of Athor, so full of love and yearning that he knew his own heart had given his fingers direction and inspiration. He sought no further.

To-morrow in the niche in the desert he would carve the want of his own soul in the countenance of the goddess.

CHAPTER XV

THE GODS OF EGYPT

It was Kenkenes' first love and so was most rapturous, but it did not cast a glamour over the stern perplexities that it entailed. He knew the suspense that is immemorial among lovers, and further to trouble him he had the harsh obstacle of different society. Rachel was a quarry-slave, a member of the lowest rank in the Egyptian scale of classes. She was an Israelite, an infidel and a reviler of the gods.

He was a descendant of kings, a devout Osirian and welcomed in Egypt's high places.

Never could extremes have been greater. But Kenkenes would not have given any of these obstacles a moment's consideration had not the weight of their neglect fallen on the shoulders of Rachel. If he had been a sovereign he could have taken her freely, and purple-wearing Egypt would have kissed her sandal; but he occupied a place that could provide with honor only him who was born to it.

To lift Rachel to that position would be to expose her to the affronts of an undemocratic society. On the other hand he might sacrifice name and station and go down to her; but he was not to be judged harshly because he hesitated at this step.

Rachel had given him no sign of preference beyond

a pretty fellowship. In the beginning this realization had hurt him, but as he tossed night after night, troubled beyond expression, he remembered this thing with some melancholy comfort. It was a sorry solution of his problem to feel that he was unloved, and even while he recognized its efficacy, he prayed that it might not be so.

His heavy heart did not retard the progress of his statue or make its beauty indifferent. The more he suffered the greater the passion in the face. He labored daily and tirelessly.

But day by day he looked, unseen, on his love in the valley, and the oftener he looked the more irresolute he grew. The conflict between his heart and his reason was gradually shifting in favor of his love.

His longing, as it continued to crave, grew from hunger to starving, and though his reason pointed to disastrous results, his heart justified itself in the blind cry, "Rachel, Rachel!"

He had endured a month before his fortitude succumbed entirely. Once near sunset, as Rachel was proceeding toward the camp from some helpful mission to the quarries, she caught the fragments of a song, so distantly and absently sung that she could not locate it. There were singers among the Israelites, but they sang with wild exultation and more care for the sense than the melody. They had cultivated the chant and forgotten the lyric, because they had more heart for prophecy than passion. Rachel had revered her people's song, but there was something in this half-heard music that touched her youth and her love of life. She stopped to hear it well.

It had all the power and profundity of the male

voice, but it was as subdued, as flawless and sympathetic as a distant, deep-toned bell. There was not even a breath of effort in it, nor an insincere expression, and it pursued a theme of little range and much simplicity. The singer sang as spontaneously as a bird sings. She did not catch the words, but something in the fervor of the music told her it was a song of love —and a song of love unsatisfied. There was a pathos in it that touched the fountain of her tears and awoke to willingness that impulse in her womanhood that longs to comfort.

As she stood in an attitude of rapt attention, Kenkenes rounded a curve in the valley just ahead of her. The song died suddenly on his lips and the color deepened in his cheeks.

"Fie!" he exclaimed. "Here thou art, O Athor, catching me in the imperfection of my practice. Now will the keen edge of their perfect beauty be dulled upon thine ear when I come to lift my tuneful devotions to thee."

"And it was thou singing?" she asked.

"It was I—and Pentaur; mine the voice; Pentaur's the song."

"Together ye have wrought an eloquent harmony, but such a voice as thine would gild the pale effort of the poorest words," she said earnestly. "What dost thou with thy voice?"

"Once I won me a pretty compliment with it," he said softly, bending his head to look at her. She flushed and her eyes fell.

"Nay, it is but my pastime and at the command of my friends," he continued. "See. This is what has made me sing."

He unslung his wallet and took out of it a statuette of creamy chalk.

"Thus far has the Athor of the hills progressed." He put it into her hands for examination. The face was complete, the minute features as perfect as life, the plaits of long hair and all the figure exquisitely copied and shaped. The pedestal was yet in rough block. Rachel inspected it, wondering. Finally she looked up at him with praise in her eyes.

"Dost thou forgive me?" he asked.

"It is for me to ask thy forgiveness," she answered. "So we be equally indebted and therefore not in debt."

"Not so. I know the joy of creating uncramped, and the joy of copying such a model far outweighs any small delight thy little vanity may have experienced. Thy vanity? Hast thou any vanity?"

"Nay, I trust not," she replied laughingly. "Vanity is self-esteem run to seed."

"Sage! Let me make haste to carve the pedestal that I may know how low to do obeisance to wisdom. Hold it so, I pray thee."

He took the statue and set it on a flat cornice jutting from the stone wall. Rachel obediently steadied it. He selected from his tools a knife with a rounded point of wonderful keenness and smoothed away the chalk in bulk. They stood close together, the sculptor bending from his commanding height to work. From time to time he shifted his position, touching her hand often and saying little.

The pedestal given shape, he began its elaboration. Pattern after pattern of graceful foliation emerged till the design assumed the intricate complexity of the Egyptic style.

Rachel watched with absorbed interest, her head unconsciously settling to one side in critical contemplation. Kenkenes, pressing the blade firmly upon the chalk, felt her cheek touch his shoulder for a fraction of a second; his fingers lost their steadiness and direction, but not their strength; the blade slipped, and the fierce edge struck the white hand that held the statuette.

With a cry he dropped the knife, flung one arm about her and drew her very close to him. The image toppled down and was broken on the rock below, but he saw only the fine scarlet thread on the soft flesh.

Again and again he pressed the wounded hand to his lips, his eyes dimmed with tears of compunction.

"O, Rachel, Rachel!" he exclaimed in a sudden burst of passionate contrition. "Must even the most loving hand in Egypt be lifted against thee?"

The great content on the glorified face against his breast was all the expression of pardon that he asked.

"My love! My Rachel!" he whispered. "Ah, ye generous gods! indulge me still further. Let this, your richest gift, be mine."

The gods!

Stunned and only realizing that she must undo his clasp, she freed herself and retreated a little space from him.

And then she remembered.

Slowly and relentlessly it came home to her that this was one of the abominable idolaters, and she had forsworn such for ever. These very arms that had held her so shelteringly had been lifted in supplication to the idols, and the lips, whose kiss she had awaited, would swear to love her, by an image. The pitiless

truth, once admitted, smote her cruelly. She covered her face with her hands.

Kenkenes, amazed and deeply moved, went to her immediately.

"What have I said?" he begged. "What have I done?"

What had he done, indeed? But to have spoken, though to explain, would have meant capitulation. She wavered a moment, and then turning away, fled up the valley toward the camp—not from him, but from herself.

CHAPTER XVI

THE ADVICE OF HOTEP

If Mentu, looking up from the old murkets, noted that the face of his son was weary and sad, he laid it to the sudden heat of the spring; for now it was the middle of March and Ra had grown ardent and the marshes malarious. The old housekeeper, to whom the great artist mentioned his son's indisposition, glanced sharply at the young master, touched his hand when she served him at table, and felt his forehead when she pretended to smooth his hair. And having made her furtive examination, the astute old servant told the great artist that the young master was not ill. If she had further information to impart, Mentu did not give her the opportunity, for had she not said that Kenkenes was well? So he fell to his work again.

Senci noted it, and sorrowful Io, but they, like Mentu, ascribed it to the miasmas and said nothing to the young man about himself.

But Hotep was a penetrative man, and more hidden things than his friend's ailment had been an open secret to his keen eye. He did not care to know which one of the butterflies was the fluttering object of Kenkenes' bounteous love, for Hotep knew that those high-born Memphian women, who were openly partial

to the handsome young sculptor, loved him for his comeliness and his silken tongue alone. It would take a profounder soul than any they had displayed to understand and sympathize with the restive genius hidden under the smooth exterior they saw.

Therefore, with some impatience, Hotep conceded that his friend was in love, and presumably throwing himself away. So the scribe purposed, even though the attempt were inevitably fruitless, to win Kenkenes out of his dream.

One faint dawn he entered the temple to pray for his own cause at the shrine of the lovers' goddess.

In the half-night of the vast interior, at the foot of the sumptuous pedestal of Athor, he distinguished another supplicant, kneeling. But there was a hopelessness in the droop of the bowed head and a tenseness in the interlaced fingers of the clasped hands, which proved that Athor's answer had not been propitious.

Hotep knew at once who besought the goddess. Setting his offering of silver and crystal on the altar, the scribe departed with silent step. But without, he ground his teeth and execrated the giver of pain to Kenkenes.

In mid-afternoon of the same day Hotep's chariot drew up at the portals of Mentu's house, and the scribe in his most splendid raiment was conducted to Kenkenes. The young sculptor was alone.

"What was it, a palsy or the sun which kept thee at home this day?" was Hotep's greeting. "Nine is a mystic number and is fruitful of much gain. Eight times within a month have I come for thee. The ninth did supply thee. Blessed be the number."

Kenkenes smiled. "But there are seven Hathors,

and five days in the epact—and the Radiant Three. To me it seemeth there are many good numbers."

Hotep plucked his sleeve.

"Come, I will show thee the best of all—One, the One."

Kenkenes arose. "Let me robe myself befittingly, then."

"Not too effectively," the scribe cried after him. "I would not have thee blight my chances with the full blaze of thy beauty."

When Kenkenes returned Hotep looked at him with another thought than had been uppermost in his mind since he had noted his friend's dejection. This time he was impatient with Kenkenes.

"And such a man as this will permit a woman to break his heart!"

Then was the young sculptor taken to the palace of the Pharaoh. On its roof, in the great square shadow of its double towers, he was presented to a dainty little lady, whose black eyes grew large and luminous at the coming of the scribe. She was Masanath, the youngest and only unwedded child of Har-hat, the king's adviser. Her oval face had a uniform rose-leaf flush, her little nose was distinctly aquiline, her little mouth warm and ripe. Her teeth were dazzlingly white, and, like a baby's, notched on the edges with minute serrations. But with all her tininess, she planted her sandal with decision and scrutinized whosoever addressed her in a way that was eloquent of a force and perception larger by far than the lady they characterized.

And this was the love of Hotep. Kenkenes smiled. The top of her pretty head was not nearly on a level with his shoulders, and the small hand she extended

had the determined grip with which a baby seizes a proffered finger. A vision of the golden Israelite rose beside her and the smile vanished.

The day was warm and the courtiers in search of a breeze were scattered about the palace-top in picturesque groups. Masanath occupied a diphros, or double chair, and a female attendant, standing behind her, stirred the warm air with a perfumed fan. The lady was on the point of sharing her seat with one of her guests, when Har-hat, who had been lounging by himself on the parapet, sauntered over to his daughter's side.

"My father," she said, "the son of Mentu, the first friend of the noble Hotep."

Kenkenes had noticed, with a chill, the approach of the fan-bearer, and, angry with himself for his unreasoning perturbation, strove to greet him composedly. But he could not force himself into graciousness. The formal obeisance might have been made appropriately to his bitterest enemy.

"The son of Mentu and I have met before," the fan-bearer declared laughingly. "But I scarce should have recognized him in this man of peace had not his stature been impressed upon me in that hour when first I met him." The fan-bearer paused to enjoy the wonder of his daughter and the scribe, and the hardening face of Kenkenes.

"But for the agility the gods have seen fit to leave me in mine advancing years," he continued, "this self-same courteous noble would have brained me with a boat-hook on an occasion of much merrymaking, a month agone."

He sat down on the arm of Masanath's chair and

shouted with laughter. With a great effort Kenkenes controlled himself.

"Shall I give the story in full?" he asked with an odd quiet in his voice.

"Nay! Nay!" Har-hat protested; "I have told the worst I would have said concerning that defeat of mine." Again he laughed and returned to the young man's identity once more.

"Aye, I might have known that thou wast somewhat of kin to Mentu. Ye are as much alike as two owlets —same candid face."

He sauntered away, leaving an awkward silence behind him.

"Sit beside me?" asked Masanath, drawing the folds of her white robes aside to make room for the scribe. But Hotep did not seem to hear. Instead, he wandered away for another chair, became interested in a group of long-eyed beauties near by and apparently forgot Masanath. Kenkenes did not permit any lapse between the invitation and its acceptance. He dropped into the place made for Hotep, as if the offer had been extended to him.

"From Bubastis to Memphis, from Bast to Ptah," he said. "Dost thou miss the generous levels of the Delta in our crevice between the hills?"

She shook her head. "Memphis is the lure of all Egypt, and he who hath been transplanted to her would flout the favor of the gods, did he make homesick moan for his native city."

"And thou hast warmer regard for the stir of Memphis than the quiet of the north?"

"There is no quiet in the north now."

"So?"

"Nay; hast thou not heard of the Israelitish unrest?"

"Aye, I had heard—but—but hath it become of any import?"

"It is the peril of Egypt that she does not realize her menace in these Hebrews," the lady answered. "The north knows it, but it has sprung into life so recently, and from such miserable soil, that even my father, who has been away from the Delta but a few months, does not appreciate the magnitude of the disaffection."

"Thou hast lived among them, Lady Masanath. What thinkest thou of these people?" Kenkenes asked after a little silence.

"Of the mass I can not speak confidently," she answered modestly. "They are proud—they pass the Egyptian in pride; they have kept their blood singularly pure for such long residence among us; they are stubborn, querulous and unready. But above all they are a contented race if but the oppression were lifted from their shoulders. They are an untilled soil—none knows what they might produce, but the confidence of their leader, who is a wondrous man, bespeaks them a capable people. To my mind they are mistreated beyond their deserts. I would have the powers of Egypt use them better."

"Is it known in the north what Mesu's purpose is? The Israelites among us talk of their own kingdom, and I wonder if the Hebrew means to set up a nation within us, or assail the throne of the Pharaohs, or go forth and settle in another country."

The lady shrugged her shoulders. "The Hebrews talk in similitudes. The prospect of freedom so uplifts them that they chant their purposes to you, and bewil-

der you with quaint words and hidden meanings. But these three facts, my Lord, are apparent and most potent in results when combined; they are oppressed beyond endurance; they are many; they are captained by a mystic. They have but to choose to rebel, and it would tax the martial strength of Egypt to quiet them."

The magisterial dignity of the little lady was most delightful. The young sculptor's sensations were divided between interest in the grave subject she discussed and pleasure in her manner. Happening to glance in the direction of the scribe, he found the gray eye of his friend fixed upon him from the group of beauties. Presently Hotep rambled back with an ebony stool and sat a little aloof in thoughtful silence until the visit was over.

When Kenkenes alighted at the door of his father's house some time later, Hotep leaned over the wheel of the chariot and put his hand on the sculptor's shoulder.

"Thou hast met Har-hat and, by his own words, thou hast had some unpleasant commerce with him. What he did to thee I know not, but I shall let thee into mine own quarrel with him. He lays the curb of silence on my lips and enforces the indifference in my mien. If I revolt the penalty is humiliation and disaster for Masanath and for me. I love her, but I dare not let her dream it. The fan-bearer hath greater things in store for her than a scribe can promise. I am thy brother in hatred of him."

The next dawn, even before sunrise, Hotep found Kenkenes once again in the temple before the shrine of

Athor. But this time the scribe knelt silently beside his friend.

When they emerged into the sunless solemnity of the grove he turned to Kenkenes.

"With the licensed forwardness of an old friend, I would ask what thou hast to crave of the lovers' goddess, O thou loveless?"

"Favor and pardon," Kenkenes answered.

"So? But already have I reached the limit. Not even a friend may ask an accounting of a man's misdeeds."

Kenkenes smiled. "Ask me," he said, "and spare me the effort of voluntary confession."

"Then, what hast thou done?"

"Come and look upon mine offense. Thine eyes will serve thee better than my tongue."

The pair were in costume hardly fitted for the dust of the roadway, but Memphis was not astir. They went across the city toward the river and at the landings found an early-rising boatman, who let them his bari.

Kenkenes took the oars and moved out into the middle of the swiftest current of the Nile. There he headed down-stream and permitted the boat to drift.

The clear heavens, blue and pellucid as a sapphire, were still cool, but from the lower slope down the east a radiance began to crawl upward. The peaks of the Libyan desert grew wan.

The young men did not resume their talk. The dawn in Egypt was a solemn hour. Kenkenes raised his eyes to the heights of the west. On the shore a group approached the Nile edge, and Hotep guessed by

the cluster of fans and standards that it was the Pharaoh at his morning devotions to Nilus. The white points on the hilltops reddened and caught fire.

Softly and absently Kenkenes began to sing a hymn to the sunrise. Hotep rested his cheek on one hand and listened. More solemn, more appealing the notes grew, fuller and stronger, until the normal power of the rich voice was reached. The liquid echo on the water gave it a mellow embellishment, and Hotep saw the central figure of the group on shore lift his hand for silence among the courtiers.

But Kenkenes sang on unconscious even of his nearest auditor. After the nature of humanity he was nearer to his gods in trouble than in tranquillity.

The white fronts of Memphis receded slowly, for neither took up the oars. Hotep hesitated to break the silence that fell after the end of the hymn. The shadow on the singer's face proved that the heart would have flinched at any effort to soothe it. It was the young sculptor's privilege to speak first.

After a long silence, Kenkenes roused himself.

"Look to the course of the bari, Hotep, and chide it with an oar if it means to beach us. I doubt me much if I am fit to control it with the wine of this wind on my brain."

Hotep took up the oars and rowed strongly. "Thine offense does not sit heavily on thy conscience," he said.

"I have made my peace with Athor."

"Hath she given thee her word?"

"Nay, no need. For I did not offend her. Rather hath she abetted me—urged me in my trespass. She persuaded me to become vagrant with her, and I fol-

lowed the divine runaway into the desert. I doubt not I was chosen because I was as lawless as her needs required. Athor is beautiful and would prove herself so to her devotees. And to me was the lovely labor appointed."

Hotep looked at him mystified.

"By the gods," he said at last, "thou hadst better get in out of this wind."

Kenkenes laughed genuinely. "My babble will take meaning ere long. If thou questionest me, I must answer, but I am determined not to betray my secret yet."

"Go we to On?" Hotep asked plaintively, after a long interval of industry for him and dream for Kenkenes. The young sculptor sat up and looked at the opposite shore. "Nay," he cried, "we are long past the place where we should have landed. Yonder is the Marsh of the Discontented Soul. Let me row back."

He turned and pulled rapidly toward the eastern shore. Away to the south, behind them, were the quarries of Masaarah. But they were still a considerable distance above Toora, a second village of quarry-workers, now entirely deserted. The pitted face of the mountain behind the town was without life, for, as has been seen, Meneptah was not a building monarch. Directly opposite them the abrupt wall of the Arabian hills pushed down near to the Nile and the intervening space was a flat sandy stretch, ending in a reedy marsh at the water's edge. The line of cultivation ended far to the south and north of it, though the soil was as arable as any bordering the Nile. A great number of marsh geese and a few stilted waders flew up or plunged into the water with discordant cries and flap-

ping of wings as the presence of the young men disturbed the solitude. The sedge was wind-mown, and there were numberless prints of bird claws, but no mark of boat-keel or human foot. The place should have been a favorite haunt of fowlers, but it was lonely and overshadowed with a sense of absolute desertion.

"But," Hotep began suddenly, "thou hast spoken of offense and pardon, and now thou boastest that Athor abetted thee."

"Why is this called the Marsh of the Discontented Soul?"

The scribe smiled patiently. "Of a truth, dost thou not know?"

"As the immortals hear me, I do not. I have never asked and the chronicles do not speak of it."

"Nay; the story is four hundred years old, and the chroniclers do not tell it because it is out of the scope of history, I doubt not. But it has become tradition throughout Egypt to shun the spot, though few know why they must. A curse is laid upon the place. An unfaithful wife whom the priests denied repose with her ancestors is entombed yonder." He pointed toward an angle between an outstanding buttress and the limestone wall. "Her soul haunts him who comes here with the plea that her mummy be removed to On, where she dwelt in life, and laid with the respected dead, in the necropolis."

Kenkenes shrugged his shoulders. "I trust the unhappy soul will not trouble us. We came here by way of misadventure—not to disturb her. But how came it they did not entomb her nearer On?"

"She betrayed one great man and tempted another.

She offended against the lofty. Therefore, her punishment was the more heavy—her isolation in death like to banishment in life."

"So; if she had slighted a paraschite and tempted a beer brewer, her fate would have been less harsh. O, the justness of justice!"

The morning was well advanced when they reached the niche on the hillside—Hotep, wondering; Kenkenes, silent and expectant.

The sculptor led the way into the presence of Athor, and stepped aside. The scribe halted and gazed without sound or movement—petrified with amazement.

Before him, in hue and quiescence was a statue in stone—in all other respects, a human being. The figure was of white magnesium limestone, and stood upon rock yet unhewn.

The ritual had been trampled into the dust.

The eye of the most unlearned Egyptian could detect the sacrilege at a single glance.

It was the image of a girl, draped in an overlong robe, fastened over each shoulder by a fibula, ornamented with a round medallion. Through the vestments, intentionally simple, there was testimony of the exquisite lines of the figure they clothed.

The sole observance of hieratic symbol were the horns of Athor set in the hair.

The figure was posed as if in the act of a forward movement. The knee was slightly bent in an attitude of supplication. The face was upturned, the eyes lifted, the arms extended to their fullest, forward and upward, the fingers curved as if ready to receive. The hair was separated into two heavy plaits, which fell below the waist down the back.

One sandaled foot was advanced, slightly; the other hidden by the hem of the robe.

Every physical feature visible upon the living form so disposed and draped had been carved upon this grace in stone. Egypt had never fashioned anything so perfect. Indeed, she would not have called it sculpture.

The glyptic art of Greece had been paralleled hundreds of years before it was born.

On the face there was the light of overpowering love together with the intangible pride so marked on the representations of profane deities. But the most manifest emotions were the great yearning and entreaty. They were marked in the attitude of the head thrown back, in the outstretched arms and in the bent knee. That there was more hopeful expectancy than despairing insistence, was proved by the curve of the ready fingers and the uncertain smile on the lips. It was Athor, eternally young, eternally in love, eternally unsatisfied, receiving the setting sun as she had done since the world began. None of the rapturous impatience and uncertainty of the moment had been lost since the first sunset after chaos. And yet, with all the pulse and fervor, here was womanhood, immaculate and ineffable.

Never did face so command men to worship.

"Holy Amen!" the scribe exclaimed, his voice barely audible in its earnestness. "What consummate loveliness! But what—what unspeakable impiety!"

"Hast thou seen Athor? She is before thee."

"Athor! The golden goddess in the image of a mortal! Kenkenes, the wrath of the priests awaits

thee and thereafter the doom of the insulted Pantheon!" The scribe shuddered and plucked at his friend's robe as if to drag him away from the sight of his own creation.

Firmly fixed were the young artist's convictions to resist the impelling force of Hotep's consternation.

"Nay, nay, Hotep," he answered soothingly. "The wrath of the gods for an offense thus flagrant is exceedingly slow, if it is to fall. Lo! they have propitiated me at great length if they mean to accomplish mine undoing at last. Thus far, and the statue is wellnigh complete, I have met no form of obstacle."

But Hotep shook his head in profound apprehension. He looked at the statue furtively and murmured:

"O Kenkenes, what madness made thee trifle with the gods?"

"Have I not said? The goddess herself lured me. Is she not the embodied essence of Beauty? The ritual insults her. Ah, look at the statue, Hotep. How could Athor be wroth with the sculptor who called such a face as that, a likeness of her!"

"It startles me," the scribe declared. "It is supernaturally human. That is not art, but creation. O apostate, thine offense is of two-fold seriousness. Thou hast stolen the function of the divine Mother and made a living thing!"

Kenkenes laughed with sheer joy at his comrade's genuine praise. The more dismayed Hotep might be, the more sincere his compliment. But the scribe, plunged into a stupor of concern lest the authorities discover the sacrilege, went on helplessly.

"What wilt thou do with it when it is done?"

"I have left no mark of myself upon it."

"Nay, but the priesthood can scent out a blasphemer as a hound scents a jackal."

"Thou wilt not betray me, Hotep; I shall not publish myself, and the other—the only other who possesses my secret—the Israelite, who was my model, is fidelity's self. I would trust her with my soul."

"An Israelite! Thy nation's most active foe at this hour!"

"She is no enemy to me, Hotep."

Slowly the scribe's eyes traveled from the face of Athor to the face of Kenkenes. The young sculptor turned away and leaned against the great cube that walled one side of the niche. He was not prepared to meet his friend's discerning eyes. Hotep surveyed him critically. A momentous surmise forced itself upon him. He went to Kenkenes and, laying an affectionate arm across his shoulder, leaned not lightly thereon.

"Thou hast said, O my Kenkenes, that I should understand thy meaning when thou spakest mysteriously a while agone. May I not know, now? Thou didst plead offense to Athor and didst boast her pardon. Later thou calledst her thy confederate. And earliest of all, thou didst confess to asking favor of her. How may all these things be?"

"Look thou," Kenkenes began at once. "On one hand, I have my new belief concerning sculpture—on the other, the beliefs of my fathers. I practise the first and make propitiation for the second. No harm hath overtaken me. Am I not pardoned? Furthermore, Athor is beauty, and beauty guided my hand in creating this statue. Therefore, Athor being beauty,

Athor was my confederate. Is it not lucid, O Son of Wisdom?"

Hotep laughed. "Nay, thou wilt not prosper, Kenkenes. Thou servest two masters. But there is one thing still unexplained—the favor of Athor."

"That is not mine to boast. I have but craved it," Kenkenes replied hesitatingly.

"Where doth she live?" Hotep asked, by way of experiment.

"In the quarries below."

There was no more doubt in the mind of Hotep. Here was a duty, plain before him, and his dearest friend to counsel. His must be tender wisdom and persuasive authority. Not a drop of the scribe's blood was democratic. He could not understand love between different ranks of society, and, as a result, doubted if it could exist. Kenkenes must be awakened while it was time.

"Do thou hear me, O my Kenkenes," he said after some silence. "If I overstep the liberty of a friend, remind me, but remember thou—whatsoever I shall say will be said through love for thee, not to chide thee. No man shapeth his career for himself alone, nor does death end his deeds. He continues to act through his children and his children's children to the unlimited extent of time. Seest thou not, O Kenkenes, that the ancestor is terribly responsible? What more heavy punishment could be meted to the original sinner, than to set him in eternal contemplation of the hideous fruitfulness of his initial sin!

"I have said sin, because sin, only, is offense in the eyes of the gods. But sin and error are one in the unpardoning eye of nature. Thus, if thou dost err,

though in all innocence, though the gods absolve thee, thou wilt reap the bitter harvest of thy misguided sowing, one day—thou or thy children after thee. The doom is spoken, and however tardy, must fall—and the offense is never expiated. There is nothing more relentless than consequence.

"If thou weddest unwisely thou dost double thy children's portion of difficulty, since thou art unwise and their mother unfit. If, perchance, thy only error lay in thy choice of wife, the result is still the same. Let her be most worthy, and yet she may be most unfitting. She must fit thy needs as the joint fits the socket. Virtue is essential, but it is not sufficient. Beauty is good—I should say needful, but certainly it is not all. Love is indispensable and yet not enough."

"I should say that these three things are enough," put in Kenkenes.

"They would gain entrance into the place of the blest—the bosom of Osiris—but they are not sufficient for the over-nice nobility of Egypt," the scribe averred promptly. "Thou must live in the world and the world would pass judgment on thy wife. If thou art a true husband, thou wouldst defend her, and be wroth. Yet, canst thou be happy being wroth and at odds with the world?"

Kenkenes slipped from under the affectionate arm and busied himself with the statue, marking with a sliver of limestone where his chisel must smooth away a flaw. But the voice of the scribe went on steadily.

"The nobility of Egypt will not accept an unbeliever and an Israelite. That monarch who favored the son

of Abraham, Joseph, is dead. The tolerant spirit died with him. Another sentiment hath grown up and the loveliest Hebrew could not overthrow it. Henceforward, there is eternal enmity between Egypt and Israel."

The sliver of stone dropped from the fingers of the artist and his eyes wandered away, dreamy with thought. He remembered the story of the wrong of Rachel's house, and it came home to him with overwhelming force that the feud between Egypt and Israel was the barrier between him and his love. He was punished for a crime his country had committed.

"Oh!" he exclaimed to himself. "Am I not surely suffering for the sins of my fathers? How cruelly sound thy reasoning is, O thou placid Hotep!"

The scribe saw that as the sculptor stood, the pleading hands of Athor all but touched his shoulders. Hotep went to him and turned him away from the statue. He knew he could not win his friend with the beauty of that waiting face appealing to him.

"Thus far thou hast borne with me, Kenkenes—and having grown bold thereby, I would go further. Return with me to Memphis and come hither no more. She will soon be comforted, if she is not already betrothed. Egypt needs thee—the Hathors have bespoken good fortune for thee—and thou art justified in aspiring to nothing less than the hand of a princess. Come back to Memphis and let her heal thee with her congruous love."

"Nay, my Hotep, what a waste of words! I will go back to Memphis with thee, not for thy reasoning, but for mine own—nay, hers."

"Hast thou—did the Israelite—" the scribe began in amazement, and paused, ashamed of his unbecoming curiosity.

"Aye; and let us speak of it no more. Thou hast my story, my confidence and my love. Keep the first and the rest shall be thine for ever."

"And this?" questioned Hotep, nodding toward the statue, though he resolutely kept the face of Kenkenes turned from it.

"Let it be," Kenkenes replied. Hotep hesitated, dissatisfied, but feared to insist on its destruction, so he went arm in arm with his friend down to the river, without a word of protest. "I will at him again when he is better," he told himself, "and we will bury the exquisite sacrilege."

There was an animated group of Hebrew children at the Nile drawing water, and among them was a golden-haired maiden. Hotep had but to glance at her to know that he looked on the glorious model of the pale divinity on the hill above. At the sound of their approach through the grain, she looked up. As she caught sight of Kenkenes, she started and flushed quickly and as quickly the color fled.

Since she was near the boat, Kenkenes stood close beside her for a moment while he pushed the bari into the water.

"Gods! What a noble pair!" Hotep ejaculated under his breath. But he saw Kenkenes bend near the Israelite, as if to make his final plea; a spasm of anguish contracted her white face, and she turned her head away. The incident, so eloquent to Rachel and Kenkenes, had been so swift and subtile in its enact-

ment, that only the quick eye of Hotep detected it. Again he called on the gods in exclamation:

"She is saner than he!"

On the way back to Memphis he maintained a thoughtful silence. Since he had seen Rachel, he began to understand the love of Kenkenes for her.

CHAPTER XVII

THE SON OF THE MURKET

March and April had passed and now it was the first of May. Five days before, the ceremony of installation had been held for the murket and the cupbearer and for four days thereafter the new officers passed through initiatory formalities. But on the fifth day the rites of investiture had been brought to an end, and Mentu and Nechutes entered on the routine of service.

To Mentu fell the dignified congratulations of his own world of sedate old nobles and stately women. But Nechutes was younger and well beloved by youthful Memphis, so on the night of the fifth day, the house of Senci was aglow and in her banquet-room there was much young revel in his honor.

Aromatic torches flaring in sconces lighted the friezes of lotus, the painted paneling on the walls, and the clustered pillars that upheld the ceiling of the chamber. The tables had been removed; the musicians and tumblers common to such occasions were not present, for the rout was small and sufficient unto itself for entertainment.

Gathered about a central figure, which must needs be the one of highest rank—and in this instance it was the crown prince—were the young guests. They were

noblemen and gentlewomen of Memphis, freed for an evening from the restraint of pretentious affairs and spared the awesome repression of potentates and monitors.

Hotep was host and these were his guests.

First, there was Rameses, languid, cynical, sumptuous, and enthroned in a capacious fauteuil, significantly upholstered in purple and gold.

Close beside him and similarly enthroned was Ta-user. She wore a double robe of transparent linen, very fine and clinging in its texture. The over-dress was simply a white gauze, striped with narrow lines of green and gold. From the fillet of royalty about her forehead, an emerald depended between her eyes. Her zone was a broad braid of golden cords, girdling her beneath the breast, encompassing her again about the hips, and fastened at last in front by a diamond-shaped buckle of clustered emeralds. Her sandals were mere jeweled straps of white gazelle-hide, passing under the heel and ball of the foot. She was as daringly dressed as a lissome dancing-girl.

On a taboret at her right was Seti, the little prince. Although he was nearly sixteen he looked to be of even tenderer years. In him, the charms of the Egyptian countenance had been so emphasized, and its defects so reduced, that his boyish beauty was unequaled among his countrymen.

At his feet was Io, playing at dice with Ta-meri and Nechutes. Ta-meri was more than usually brilliant, and Nechutes, flushed with her favor, was playing splendidly and rejoicing beyond reason over his gains.

Opposite this group was another, the center of which was Masanath. She sat in the richest seat in

the house of Senci. It was ivory tricked with gold; but small and young as the fan-bearer's daughter was, there was none in that assembly who might queen it as royally as she from its imperial depths. By her side was the boon companion of Rameses. He was Menes, surnamed "the Bland," captain of the royal guard, a most amiable soldier and chiefly remarkable because, of all the prince's world, he was the only one that could tell the truth to Rameses and tell it without offense.

On the floor between Masanath and Menes was the son of Amon-meses, the Prince Siptah. He was a typical Oriental, bronze in hue, lean of frame, brilliant of eye, white of teeth, intense in temperament and fierce in his loves and hates. Religion comforted him through his appetites; in his sight craft was a virtue, intrigue was politics, and love was a fury. His eyes never left Ta-user for long, and his every word seemed to be inspired by some overweening emotion.

Aside from these there were others in the group. Some were sons and daughters of royalty, cousins of the Pharaoh's sons and of Ta-user and Siptah; many were children of the king's ministers, and all were noble.

Senci and Hotep's older sister, the Lady Bettis, a dark-eyed matron of thirty, presided in duenna-like guardianship over the rout. They sat in a diphros apart from the young revelers.

Kenkenes was momently expected. For the past two months he had been seen every evening wherever there was high-class revel in Memphis. But he had laughed perfunctorily and lapsed into preoccupation

when none spoke to him, and his song had a sorry note in it, however happy the theme. But these were things apparent only to those that saw deeper than the surface.

"Where is Kenkenes?" Menes demanded. "Hath he forsworn us?"

"I saw him to-day," Nechutes ventured, without raising his eyes from the game, "when we were fowling on the Nile below the city. He was alone, pulling down-stream, just this side of Masaarah."

Hotep frowned and gave over any hope that Kenkenes would join the merrymaking that night. But at that moment, Ta-meri, who sat facing the entrance to the chamber, poised the dice-box in air and drew in a long breath. The guests followed her eyes.

Kenkenes stood in the doorway, the curtain thrust aside and above him. His voluminous festal robes were deeply edged with gold, but his arms, bare to the shoulder, and his strong brown neck were without their usual trappings of jewels. The omission seemed intentional, as if the young man had meant to contrast the ornament of young strength and grace with the glitter and magnificence of the other guests. He had succeeded well.

Perhaps to most of those present, the young man's presence was not unusual, but Hotep was not blind to a manifest alteration in his manner. There was cynicism in the corners of his mouth, and a hint of hurt or temper was evident in the tension of his nostril and the brilliance of his eyes. Hotep had no need of seers and astrologers, for his perception served him in all tangible things. He knew something untoward had

set Kenkenes to thinking about himself, and guessing where the young artist had gone that evening, he surmised further how he had been received.

And though he was sorry in his heart for his friend's unhappiness, he confessed his admiration for Rachel.

"Late," cried Hotep, rising.

"Thy pardon, Hotep," Kenkenes replied, advancing into the chamber. "I had an errand of much importance to Masaarah and it was fruitless. It shall trouble me no more."

Hotep lifted his brows, as though he exclaimed to himself, and made no answer. Kenkenes greeted the guests with a wave of his hand and did obeisance before Rameses.

"Thou speakest of Masaarah, my Kenkenes," the crown prince commented after the salutation, "and it suggests an inquiry I would make of thee. Dost thou go on as sculptor, or wilt thou follow thy father into the art of building?"

"Since the Pharaoh chose for my father, he shall choose for me also."

"Nay, the Pharaoh did not choose," Rameses objected dryly. "It was I."

"Of a truth? Then thou shalt choose for me, O my generous Prince."

"Follow thy father. I would have thee for my murket. Nay, it is ever so. I mold the Pharaoh and he gets the credit."

"And thou, the blame, when blame accrues from the molding," Menes put in very distinctly, though under his breath.

"But be thou of cheer, O Son of the Sun," Ken-

kenes added. "When thou art Pharaoh, thou canst retaliate upon thine own heir, in the same fashion."

"Thou givest him tardy comfort, O Son of Mentu," Siptah commented with an unpleasant laugh. "He will lose all recollection of the grudge, waiting so long."

Rameses turned his heavy eyes toward the speaker, but Kenkenes halted any remark the prince might have made.

"Nay, let it pass," he said placidly, dropping into a chair. "All this savors too much of the future and is out of place in the happy improvidence of the present."

"Let it all pass?" Ta-user asked. "Nay, I would hold the prince to the promise he made a moment agone, when the choosing of the new murket comes round again."

"Do thou so, for me, then, when that time comes," Kenkenes interrupted.

Ta-user laughed very softly and delivered the young artist a level look of understanding from her topaz eyes. "I fear thou art indeed improvident," she continued, "if thou leavest thy future to others."

"Then all the world is improvident, since it belongeth to others to shape every man's future. But Hotep, the lawgiver, denies this thing. He holds that every man builds for himself."

"Right, Hotep!" Rameses exclaimed. "It was such belief that made a world-conqueror of my grandsire."

"Nay, thy pardon, O my Prince. Hotep's counsel will not always hold," Kenkenes objected.

"Give me to know wherein it faileth," the prince demanded.

"Alas! in a thousand things. In truth a man even draws his breath by the leave of others."

"By the puny god, Harpocrates!" the prince cried, scoffing. "That is the weakest avowal I have heard in a moon!"

Kenkenes flushed, and Rameses, recovering from his amusement, pressed his advantage.

"Let me give thee a bit of counsel from mine own store that thou mayest look with braver eyes on life. Take the world by the throat and it will do thy will."

"Again I dispute thee, O Rameses."

"Name thy witness," the prince insisted. Kenkenes leaned on his elbow toward him.

"Canst thou force a woman to love thee?" he asked simply.

Ta-user glanced at the prince and the sleepy black eyes of the heir narrowed.

"Let us get back to the issue," he said. "We spoke of others shaping the future of men. You may not force a woman to love you, but no love or lack of love of a woman should misshape the destiny of any man."

"That is a matter of difference in temperament, my Prince," Ta-user put in.

"It may be, but it is the expression of mine own ideas," he answered roughly.

The lashes of the princess were smitten down immediately and Siptah's canine teeth glittered for a moment, one set upon the other. Kenkenes patted his sandal impatiently and looked another way. His gaze fell on Io. She had lost interest in the game. The color had receded from her cheeks and now and again her lips trembled. Kenkenes looked and saw that Seti's eyes were adoring Ta-user, who smiled at him.

With a sudden rush of heat through his veins, the young artist turned again to Io, and watched till he caught her eye. With a look he invited her to come to him. She laid down the dice, during the momentary abstraction of her playing-mates, and murmuring that she was tired, came and sat at the feet of her champion.

"Wherefore dost thou retreat, Io?" Ta-user asked. "Art vanquished?"

"At one game, aye!" the girl replied vehemently.

Kenkenes laid his hand on her head and said to her very softly:

"If only our pride were spared, sweet Io, defeat were not so hard."

The girl lifted her face to him with some questioning in her eyes.

"Knowest thou aught of this game, in truth?" she asked.

He smiled and evaded. "I have not been fairly taught."

Ta-meri gathered up the stakes and Nechutes, collecting the dice, went to find her a seat. But while he was gone, she wandered over to Kenkenes and leaned on the back of his chair.

"Let me give thee a truth that seemeth to deny itself in the expression," Io said, turning so that she faced the young artist.

"Say on," he replied, bending over her.

"The more indifferent the teacher in this game of love, the sooner you learn," said Io. Kenkenes took the tiny hand extended toward him in emphasis and kissed it.

"Sorry truth!" he said tenderly. As he leaned back in his chair he became conscious of Ta-meri's presence

and turned his head toward her. Her face was so near to him that he felt the glow from her warm cheek. His gaze met hers and, for a moment, dwelt.

All the attraction of her gorgeous habiliments, her warm assurance and her inceptive tenderness detached themselves from the general fusion and became distinct. Her beauty, her fervor, her audacity, were not unusually pronounced on this occasion, but the spell for Kenkenes was broken and the inner workings were open to him. Different indeed was the picture that rose before his mind—a picture of a fair face, wondrously and spiritually beautiful; of the quick blush and sweet dignity and unapproachable womanhood. His eyes fell and for a moment his lids were unsteady, but the color surged back into his cheeks and his lips tightened.

He took Io's hands, which were clasped across his knee, and rising, gave the chair to Ta-meri. He found a taboret for himself, and as he put it down at her feet, he saw Nechutes fling himself into a chair and scowl blackly at the nomarch's daughter. Kenkenes sighed and interested himself in the babble that went on about him.

The first word he distinguished was the name of Har-hat, pronounced in clear tones. Menes, who sat next to Kenkenes, put out his foot and trod on the speaker's toes. The man was Siptah.

"Choke before thou utterest that name again," the captain said in a whisper, "else thou wilt have Rameses abusing Har-hat before his daughter."

"What matters it to me, his temper or her hurt?" Siptah snarled.

"Churl!" responded Menes, amiably.

"What is amiss between the heir and the fan-bearer?" Kenkenes asked.

"Everything! Rameses fairly suffocates in the presence of the new adviser. The Pharaoh is sadly torn between the twain. He worships Rameses and, body of Osiris! how he loves Har-hat! But sometime the council chamber with the trio therein will fall—the walls outward, the roof, up—mark me!"

Again, clear and with offensive emphasis, Siptah's voice was heard disputing, in the general babble.

"Magnify the cowardice of the Rebu if you will, but it was Har-hat who made them afraid," he was saying.

The slow eyes of Rameses turned in the direction of the tacit challenge. Menes' black brows knitted at Siptah, but Kenkenes came to the rescue. A lyre, the inevitable instrument of ancient revels, was near him and he caught it up, sweeping his fingers strongly across the strings.

A momentary silence fell, broken at once by the applause of the peace-loving, who cried, "Sing for us, Kenkenes!"

He shook his head, smiling. "I did but test the harmony of the strings; harmony is grateful to mine ear."

Menes' lips twitched. "If harmony is here," he said with meaning, "you will find it in the instrument."

Again, a voice from the general conversation broke in—this time from Rameses.

"Kenkenes hath outlasted an army of other singers. I knew him as such when mine uncles yet lived and my father was many moves from the throne. It was while we dwelt unroyally here in Memphis. They made thee sing in the temple, Kenkenes. Dost thou remember?"

"Aye," Ta-user took it up. "They made thee sing in the temple and it went sore against thee, Kenkenes. Most of the upper classes in the college here were hoarse or treble by turns, and the priests required thee by force from thy tutors because thou couldst sing. Thou wast a stubborn lad, as pretty as a mimosa and as surly as a caged lion. I can see thee now chanting, with a voice like a lark, and frowning like a very demon from Amenti!"

The princess laughed musically at her own narration and received the applause of the others with a serene countenance. She had repaid Kenkenes for his implied championship of her cause earlier in the evening.

"Art still as reluctant, Kenkenes?" the Lady Senci called to him.

Kenkenes looked at the lyre and did not answer at once. There was no song in his heart and a moody silence seemed more like to possess his lips. His audience, too, was not in the temper for song. He took in the expression of the guests with a single comprehensive glance. Siptah's hands were clenched and his face was blackened with a frown. Ta-user's silken brows were lifted, and even the pallid countenance of the prince was set and his eyes were fixed on nothing. Seti was entangled by the princess' witchery and he saw no one else. Io, blanched and miserable, forgotten by Seti, forgot all others. In his heart Kenkenes knew that Nechutes was unhappy and Hotep and Masanath; and even if there were those in the banquet-room who had no overweening sorrow, the evident discontent of the troubled oppressed them.

Far from finding inspiration for song in the faces

of the guests, Kenkenes felt an impulse to rush out of the atmosphere of unrest and unhappiness into the solitary night, where no intrusion of another's sorrow could dispute the great triumph of his own grief. The bitter soul in him longed to laugh at the idea of singing.

The hesitation between Senci's invitation and his answer was not noticeable. He put the instrument out of his reach, tossing it on a cushion a little distance away.

"Not so reluctant," he said, turning his face toward the lady, "as unready. I have exhausted my trove of songs for this self-same company,—wherefore they will not listen to reiteration, which is ever insipid."

Senci wisely accepted his excuse, and pressed him no further. One or two of the more observant members of the company looked at him, with comprehension in their eyes. Seldom, indeed, had Kenkenes refused to sing, and his reluctance corroborated their suspicions that all was not well with the young artist.

The irrepressible Menes observed to Io in one of his characteristic undertones, but so that all the company heard it: "What makes us surly to-night? Look at Kenkenes; I think he is in love! What aileth thee, sweet Io? Hast lost much to that gambling pair—Ta-meri and Nechutes? And behold thy fellows! What a sulky lot! I am the most cheerful spirit among us."

"Boast not," she responded; "it is not a virtue in you. You would be blithe in Amenti, for one can not get mournful music out of a timbrel."

The soldier's eyes opened, and he caught at her, but she eluded him and growled prettily under her breath.

"Come, Bast," he cried, making after her. "Kit, kit, kit!"

She sprang away with a little shriek and Kenkenes, throwing out his arm, caught her and drew her close.

"Menes is malevolent—" he began.

"Aye, malevolent as Mesu!" she panted.

"What!" the soldier cried. "Has the Hebrew sorcerer already become a bugbear to the children?"

"If he become not a bugbear to all Egypt, we may thank the gods," Siptah put in.

Rameses laughed scornfully, but Ta-user and Seti spoke simultaneously:

"Siptah speaks truly."

"Yea, Menes," the heir scoffed; "he hath already become a bugbear to the infants. Hear them confess it?"

Siptah buried his clenched hand in a cushion on the floor near him.

"O thou paternal Prince," he said, "repeat us a prayer of exorcism as a father should, and rid us of our fears."

"And pursuant of the custom bewailed an hour agone, we shall return thanks to the Pharaoh, for the things thou dost achieve, O our Rameses," Menes added.

"If there are any prayers said," the prince replied, "the Hebrews will say them. Mine exorcism will be harsher than formulas."

The rest of the company ceased their undertone and listened.

"Wilt thou tell us again what thou hast said, O Prince?" Kenkenes asked.

"Mine exorcism of the Hebrew sorcerer, Mesu, will

be harsher than formulas. I shall not beseech the Israelites and it will avail them naught to beseech me."

"Thou art ominous, Light of Egypt," Kenkenes commented quietly. "Wilt thou open thy heart further and give us thy meaning?"

"Hast lived out of the world, O Son of Mentu? The exorcism will begin ere long. In this I give thee the history of Israel for the next few years and close it. I shall not fall heir to the Hebrews when I come to wear the crown of Egypt."

"Are they to be sent forth?" Kenkenes asked in a low tone.

Rameses laughed shortly.

"Thou art not versed in the innuendoes of court-talk, my Kenkenes. Nay, they die in Egypt and fertilize the soil."

"It will raise a Set-given uproar, Rameses," Menes broke in with meek conviction; "and as thou hast said —to the king, the credit—to his advisers, the blame."

"Nay; the process is longer and more natural," the prince replied carelessly. "It is but the same method of the mines. Who can call death by hard labor, murder?"

The full brutality of the prince's meaning struck home. Kenkenes gripped the arm of Ta-meri's chair with such power that the sinews stood up rigid and white above the back of the brown hand. Luckily, all of the guests were contemplating Rameses with more or less horror. They did not see the color recede from the young artist's face or his eyes ignite dangerously.

Masanath sat up very straight and leveled a pair of eyes shining with accusation at the prince.

"Of a truth, was thine the fiat?" she demanded.

"Even so, thou lovely magistrate," he answered with an amused smile. "Was it not a masterful one?"

Hotep delivered her a warning glance, but she did not heed it. Austere Ma, the Defender of Truth, could have been as easily crushed.

"Masterful!" she cried. "Nay! Menes, lend me thy word. Of all Set-given, pitiless, atrocious edicts, that is the cruelest! Shame on thee!"

At her first words, Rameses raised himself from his attitude of languor into an upright and intensely alert position. The company ceased to breathe, but Kenkenes heaved a soundless sigh of relief. Masanath had uttered his denunciations for him.

Meanwhile the prince's eyes began to sparkle, a rich stain grew in his cheeks and when she made an end he was the picture of animated delight. For the first time in his life he had been defied and condemned.

But his gaze did not disturb Masanath. Her eyes dared him to resent her censure. The prince had no such purpose in mind.

"O by Besa! here is what I have sought for so long," he exclaimed, at last. "Hither! thou treasure, thou dear, defiant little shrew! Thou art more to me than all the wealth of Pithom. Hither, I tell thee!"

But she did not move. The company was breathing with considerable relief by this time, but not a few of them were casting furtive glances at Ta-user.

"Hither!" Rameses commanded, stamping his foot. "Nay, I had forgot she defies my power. Behold, then, I come to thee."

Masanath anticipated his intent, and rising with much dignity, she put the ivory throne between her and the prince. Cool and self-possessed she gathered

up her lotuses, as fresh after an evening in her hand as they were when the slaves gathered them from the Nile; found her fan and made other serene preparations to depart. Rameses, fended from her by the chair, stood before her and watched with a smile in his eyes.

Presently he waved his hand to the other guests.

"Arise; the princess is going," he commanded.

In the stir and rustle, laughter and talk of the guests, getting up at the prince's sign—for it was customary to permit the highest of rank to dismiss a company—Masanath slipped from among them and attempted to leave unnoticed. But Rameses was before her and had taken possession of her hand before she could elude him. As Kenkenes passed them on his way to the door her soft shoulders were squared; she had drawn herself as far away from the prince as she might and was otherwise evincing her discomfort extravagantly.

Before them was Hotep, outwardly undisturbed, smiling and complacent. At one side was Ta-user, at the other Seti, and Io hung on Hotep's arm.

The young artist walked past them hurriedly, moved to leave all the ferment and agitation behind him. If he had thought to forget his sorrows among the light-hearted revel of those that did not sorrow, he misdirected his search.

At the doors the Lady Senci met him and drew him over to the diphros, now vacated by Bettis.

And there she took his face between her hands and kissed him.

"Hail! thou son of the murket!" she said.

"Having much, I am given more," he responded.

"Behold the prodigality of good fortune. The Hathors exalt me in the world and add thereto a kiss from the Lady Ṣenci."

"I was impelled truly," she confessed, "but by thine own face as well as by the Hathors. Kenkenes, if I did not know thee, I should say thou wast pretending —thou, to whom pretense is impossible."

He did not answer, for there was no desire in his heart to tell his secret; his experience with Hotep had warned him. Yet the unusual winsomeness of his father's noble love was hard to resist.

"Thy manner this evening betrays thee as striving to hide one spirit and show another," she continued, seeing he made no response.

"Thou hast said," he admitted at last; "and I have not succeeded. That is a sorry incapacity, for the world has small patience with a man who can not make his face lie."

"Bitter! Thou!" she chid.

"Have I not spoken truly?" he persisted.

"Aye, but why rebel? No man but hides a secret sorrow, and this would be a tearful world did every one weep when he felt like it."

"But I am most overwhelmingly constrained to weep, so I shall stay out of the world and vex it not."

She looked at him with startled eyes.

"Art thou so troubled, then?" she asked in a lowered tone.

"Doubly troubled—and hopelessly," he replied, his eyes away from her.

She came nearer and, putting up her hands, laid them on his shoulders.

"You are so young, Kenkenes—so young, and youth

is like to make much of the little first sorrows. Furthermore, these are troublous days. Saw you not the temper of the assembly to-night? Egypt is a-quiver with irritation. Every little ripple in the smooth current of life seems magnified—each man seeketh provocation to vent his causeless exasperation. And when such ferment worketh in the gathering of the young, it is portentous. It bodeth evil! You are but caught in the fever, my Kenkenes, and your little vexations are inflamed until they hurt, of a truth. Get to your rest, and to-morrow her smile will be more propitious."

Kenkenes looked at the uplifted face and noted the laugh in the eyes.

"What a tattling face is mine," he said. "Is her name written there also?" He drew his fingers across his forehead.

"No need; I have been young and many are the young that have wooed and wed beneath mine eyes. I know the signs." She nodded sagely and continued after a little pause:

"I shall not pry further into your sorrow, Kenkenes; but you are good and handsome, and winsome, and wealthy, and young, and it is a stony heart that could hold out long against you. I would wager my mummy that the maiden is this instant well-nigh ready to cast herself at your feet, save that your very excellence deters her. Go, now, and let your dreams be sweeter than these last waking hours have been."

Again she kissed him and let him go.

In the corridor without, he received his mantle and kerchief from a servant and continued toward the outer portals. But before he reached them, Ta-meri stepped out of a cross-corridor and halted. Never be-

fore did her eyes so shine or her smile so flash within the cloud of gauzes that mantled and covered her. Kenkenes wondered for a moment if he must explain the change in his countenance to her also. But the beauty had herself in mind at that moment.

"Kenkenes, thou hast given me no opportunity to wish thee well, as the son of the murket."

"Ah, but in this nook thy good wishes will be none the less sincere nor my delight any less apparent."

"Most heartily I give thee joy!"

Kenkenes kissed her hand. "And wilt thou say that to Nechutes and put him in the highest heaven?"

"Already have I wished him well," she responded, pretending to pout, "but he repaid me poorly."

"Nay! What did he?"

"Begged me to become his wife."

"And having given him the span, thou didst yield him the cubit also when he asked it?" he surmised.

"Nay, not yet. But—shall I?" she lifted her face and looked at him, smiling and bewitchingly beautiful. Her eyes dared him; her lips invited him; all her charms rose up and besought him. For a moment, Kenkenes was startled. If he had believed that Ta-meri loved him never so slightly, his sensations would have been most distressing. But he knew and was glad to know that he awakened nothing deeper than a superficial partiality, which lasted only as long as he was in her sight to please her eye. In spite of his consternation, he could think intelligently enough to surmise what had inspired her words. The Lady Senci had guessed the nature of his trouble; even Menes had hinted a suspicion of the truth in a bantering way. What would prevent the beauty from seeing

it also and preëmpting to herself the honors of his disheartenment? But he was in no mood for a coquettish tilt with her. His sober face was not more serious than his tone when he made answer:

"Do not play with him, Ta-meri. He is worthy and loves thee most tenderly. Thou lovest him. Be kind to thine own heart and put him to the rack no more. Thou art sure of him and I doubt not it pleases thee to tantalize thyself a little while; but Nechutes, who must endure the lover's doubts, is suffering cruelly. Thou art a good child, Ta-meri; how canst thou hurt him so?"

He paused, for her eyes, growing remorseful, had wandered away from him. He knew he had reasoned well. The guests in the banquet-room began to emerge, talking and laughing. The voice of Nechutes was not heard among them. Kenkenes glanced toward the group and saw the cup-bearer a trifle in advance, his sullen face averted.

"He comes yonder," Kenkenes added in a whisper, "poor, moody boy! Go back to him and take him all the happiness I would to the gods I knew. Farewell."

He pressed her hand and continued toward the door.

Once again he was hailed, this time by Rameses. He halted, stifling a groan, and returned to the prince. Nechutes and Ta-meri had disappeared.

"One other thing, I would tell thee, Kenkenes," the prince said, "and then thou mayest go. The Pharaoh heard a song to the sunrise on the Nile some time ago and I identified the voice for him. He would have thee sing for him, Kenkenes."

"The Pharaoh's wish is law," was the slow answer.

"Oh, it was not a command," Rameses replied affably, for he was still holding Masanath's hand and there-

fore in high good humor with himself. "In truth he said the choice should be thine whether thou wilt or not. He would not insist that a nobleman become his minstrel. But more of this later; the gods go with thee."

Kenkenes bowed and escaped.

In his room a few moments later, he lighted his lamp of scented oils and contemplated the comforts about him. His conscience pointed a condemning finger at him. Here was luxury to the point of uselessness for himself; across the Nile was the desolate quarry-camp for his love. In Memphis he had robed himself in fine linen and reveled, had eaten with princes and slept sumptuously—in his strength and his manhood and unearned idleness. And she, but a tender girl, had toiled for the quarry-workers and fasted and now faced death in the hideous extermination purposed for her race.

He ground his teeth and prayed for the dawn.

He forgot that he had come away from the Arabian hills because she repelled him; he remembered his scruples concerning their social inequality, only to revile himself; Hotep's caution was more than ever a waste of words to him. He forgot everything except that he was here in comfort, she, there in want and in peril, and he had not rescued her.

He did not sleep. He tossed and counted the hours.

"Sing for the Pharaoh!" he exclaimed, "aye, I will sing till the throat of me cracks—not for the reward of his good will alone, but for Rachel's liberty. That first, and the unraveling of this puzzle thereafter."

CHAPTER XVIII

AT MASAARAH

Since the day Kenkenes had wounded her hand with the knife, Rachel had seen him but twice in many weeks.

One mid-morning, the oxen were unyoked from the water-cart and led ambling up to the pit where a monolith, too huge to be moved by men alone, had been taken forth and was to be transferred to the Nile. The bearers carried water directly from the river during this time, and it was given Rachel to govern them in the departure from the routine.

Suddenly she became aware that some one approached through the grain, and when she raised her head, she looked up into the face of Kenkenes. It was Kenkenes, indeed, but Kenkenes in robes of rustling linen and trappings of gold. Never had she seen so stately an Egyptian, nor any so entitled to the name of nobleman. In quick succession she experienced the moving sensations of surprise, pride in him, and depression. The last fell on her with the instant recollection of duty, when his face bent appealingly over hers. Trembling, she turned away from him, and when she looked again, he was returning to Memphis.

Now, her days had ceased to be the dreamy lapses

of time in which she lived and walked. The glamour that had made the quarries sufferable had passed; all the realization of her enslavement, with the accompanying shame, came to her, and her hope for Israel was lost in the destruction of her personal happiness.

Still, the longing to look on Kenkenes once again made the dawns more welcome, the days longer and the sunsets more disheartening. Vainly she summoned pride to her aid; vainly she exhorted herself to consistency.

"How long," she would say, "since thou didst reject the good Atsu because he is an idolater and an Egyptian? How long since thou wast full of wrath against the chosen people who wedded Egyptians and became of them? And now, who is it that is full of sighs and strange conduct? Who is it that hath forgotten the idols and the abominations and the bondage of her people and mourneth after one of the oppressors? And how will it be with thee when the chosen people go forth, or the carving is complete and the Egyptian cometh no more; or how will it be when he taketh one of the long-eyed maidens of his kind to wife?"

In the face of all this, her intuition rose up and bore witness that the Egyptian loved her, and was no less unhappy than she.

So time came and went and weeks passed and he came not again. Late, one sunset, while there yet was daylight, she left the camp merely that she might wander down the valley to the same spot where, at the same hour, she had met Kenkenes on that last occasion of talk between them.

Moving slowly down the shadows, she saw a figure

approaching. The stature of the new-comer identified him. The head was up, the step slow, the bearing expectant. In the one scant lapse between two throbs of her heart, Rachel knew her lover, remembered all the power of his attraction, and realized that her joy and love could carry her beyond her fortitude and resolution.

Just ahead of her, not farther than three paces, a long fragment of rock had fallen from above and leaned against the wall. There was an ample space formed by its slant against the cliff and almost before she knew it, she had crept into this crevice. Cowering in the dusk, she clutched at her loud-beating heart and listened intently.

There was no sound of his steps on the rough roadway of the valley and though she watched eagerly from her hiding-place, she did not see him pass. After a long time she emerged. He was gone.

When she looked in the dust she found that his footprints turned not far from her hiding-place and led toward the Nile.

She knew then that he had seen her when she had caught sight of him, and failing to meet her as he had expected, had guessed she had hidden from him.

This was the sunset of the night of the revel at Senci's house. It was this incident that had made Kenkenes late at the festivities, and cynical when he came.

On her way back to the camp Rachel met Atsu, mounted and attended by a scribe, the taskmaster's secretary. The two officials were on their way to Memphis to worship in the great temple and to spend a night among free-born men. Once every month,

no oftener, did Atsu return to his own rank in the city. Recognizing Rachel, he drew up his horse; the scribe rode on.

"Hast been in search of the Nile wind, Rachel? The valley holds the day-heat like an oven," he said.

"Nay, I did not go so far. The darkness came too quickly."

"Endure it a while. I shall move the people into the large valley where they may have the north breeze and the water-smell after sunset, now that the summer is near. I am glad I met thee. Deborah tells me the water for the camp-cooking is turbid, and I doubt not the children draw it from some point below the wharf where the drawing for the quarry-supply stirs up the ooze. Do thou go with the children in the morning when they are sent for the camp supply, and get it above the wharf."

"I hear," she answered.

"The gods attend thee," he said, riding away.

"Be thy visit pleasant," she responded, and turned again up the valley.

The taskmaster was forgotten at her second step, and her contrition and humiliation came back with a rush. There was little sleep for her that night, so heavy was her heart.

The next morning Rachel obeyed Atsu and followed the children to the Nile. Crossing the field, absorbed in her trouble, she did not hear the beat of hoofs or the grind of wheels until she was face to face with the attendants of a company of charioteers. The troop of water-carriers had scattered out of the road-way and each little bronzed Israelite was bending with his

right hand upon his left knee in token of profound respect. Rachel hastily joined them.

When she looked again the retinue of servants had passed. After them came a gilded chariot with a sumptuous Egyptian within. By the annulets over his temples and the fringed ribbons pendent therefrom, the Israelite knew him to be royal.

Behind, a second chariot was driven by a single occupant, who wore the badges of princehood also.

The third was a chariot of ebony drawn by two prancing coal-black horses whose leathers and housings shone and jingled. Rachel's eyes met those of the driver and the life-current froze in her veins. Harhat, fan-bearer to the Pharaoh, late governor of Bubastis, drew up his horses and calmly surveyed her. The action halted the chariots of a dozen courtiers following him. One by one they came to a stand-still and each man peered around his predecessor until the fan-bearer became conscious of the pawing horses behind him. He drove out of line and alighted. With an apologetic wave of his hand, he motioned the procession to proceed and busied himself with the harness as if he had found a breakage. Those that had passed were by this time some distance ahead and, missing the grind of wheels in their wake, looked back. The fan-bearer beckoned to one of the attendants who had gone before, and the man returned.

Meanwhile the procession moved on and the nobles glanced first at the fan-bearer, and next, at the Israelite. But Athor in the niche on the hillside was not more white and stony than its living model in the valley. There was no retreat. The fan-bearer stood

between her and the Nile, his servant between her and the quarries. She felt the sickening numbness that stupefies one who realizes a terrible strait, from which there is neither succor nor escape.

The procession passed and the servant, halting, bowed to his master. He was short and fat, thick of neck and long of arm—a most unusual Egyptian. Har-hat tossed him the reins and, walking around his horses, approached Rachel. The smallest Hebrew—too small to be awed and yet old enough to realize that the beloved Rachel was in danger, dropped the hide he bore, and flinging himself before her, clasped her with his arms, and turned a defiant face at Har-hat over his shoulder. The fan-bearer paused.

"It is the very same," he said laughingly. "The hard life of the quarries hath not robbed thee in the least of thy radiance. But by the gambling god, Toth, thou didst take a risk! Dost dream what thou didst miss through a malevolent caprice of the Hathors? Five months ago I would have taken thee out of bondage into luxury but for an industrious taskmaster and the unfortunate interference of a royal message. But the Seven Sisters repent, and I find thee again."

Rachel had fixed her eyes upon the white walls of Memphis shining in the morning sun, and did not seem to hear him.

"Nay, now, slight me not! It was the fault of the taskmaster and not mine. I confess the charm of distant Memphis, but it is more glorious within its walls. I am come to take thee thither. Thank me with but a look, I pray thee."

Seeing she did not move nor answer, he tilted his head to one side and surveyed her with interest.

"Hath much soft persuasion surfeited thee into deafness?" The color surged up into Rachel's face.

"Ha!" he exclaimed, "not so! Perhaps thou art but reluctant, then." He whirled upon the other children, cowering behind him.

"Is she wedded?" he demanded.

Frightened and trembling, they did not answer till he repeated the question and stamped his foot. Then one of them shook his head.

"It is well. I need not delay till a slave-husband were disposed of in the mines. Hither, Unas!"

The fat servitor came forward.

"I know this taskmaster not, nor can I coax or press him into giving her up without the cursed formality of a document of gift from the Pharaoh. Get thee back to Memphis with this," he drew off a signet ring and gave it to the servitor, "and to the palace. There have my scribe draw up a prayer to the Pharaoh, craving for me the mastership over the Israelite, Rachel,—for household service." The fan-bearer laughed. "Forget not this latter phrase, else the Pharaoh might fancy I would take her to wife. Haste thee! and bring back Nak and Hebset with thee to row the boat back, and help thee fetch her. She may have a lover who might make trouble for thee alone. Get thee gone."

He took the reins from his servitor's hands and turned again toward Rachel.

"I go forth to hunt, and there is danger in that pastime. I may not return. It would be most fitting to bid me a tender farewell, but thou art cruel. Nevertheless, I shall care for myself most diligently this day, and return to thee in Memphis by nightfall. Fare-

well!" He sprang into his chariot and, urging his horses, pursued the far-away procession at a gallop.

Unas was already at the Nile-side, preparing to return to Memphis. To Rachel it seemed as if she had been set free for a moment, that her efforts to escape and her inevitable capture might amuse her tormentor. And after the manner of the miserable captive so beset, she seized upon the momentary release and sought to fly. The three little Hebrews clung to her—the one that had answered Har-hat weeping bitterly and remorsefully.

"Nay, weep not," she said in a hurried whisper. "It would have ended just the same. Heard ye not what he said concerning a husband? But let me go! Let Rachel hide ere the serving men return!"

She undid their arms and ran back toward the quarries. For a moment the children hesitated and then they pursued her, crying in an undertone as they ran. Past the stone-pits, up the winding valley she fled until she reached the encampment and her own tent.

The women saw her come and old Deborah, who was preparing vegetables for the noonday meal, left the fires and hastened to the shelter. There, Rachel, choking with terror and tears, gave the story of the morning.

Deborah made no interruption and after the disjointed and unhappy recital was complete, she sat for some moments, motionless and silent. Then she arose and made as if to leave the tent, but Rachel caught at her hand in affright.

"Nay, be not so frightened," the old woman said soothingly. "I go to look for Atsu. He will come in a little while."

With that, she went forth. After a time—more than two hours, in truth, but infinitely longer to Rachel, the voice of the taskmaster was heard without, talking with Deborah. He was permitting no curb to the expression of his rage.

"The gods rend his heart to ribbons!" he panted after a tempest of anathema. "Curse the insatiate brute! Is there not enough of Egypt's women who are willingly loose that he must destroy the purest spirit on earth? He shall not have her, if I take his life to save her!"

After a moment's savage rumination, he broke out again.

"He has us on the hip! We shall be put to it to hide her away from him now. Do thou go to her—nay, I will go."

Rachel heard him enter the tent and walk across the matting on the floor. She flung her arm over her face and huddled closer to the linen-covered heap of straw against which she had thrown herself. Even the eyes of the taskmaster were intolerable, in her shame. Atsu plunged into the heart of his subject at once.

"There is no escape in the choosing of the tens, now, Rachel. I have said that I would not vex thee again with my love. Once I offered thee marriage as refuge. My love and the shelter of my name are thine to take or leave. I will urge thee no more."

He paused for a space and, as she made no answer, he went on as though she had rejected him explicitly.

"Then I shall hide thee somewhere in Egypt. The ruse is not secure, but it may serve."

She sat up and put the hair back from her face.

"Thou good Atsu," she said in a voice subdued with much weeping. "Wilt thou add more to mine already hopeless indebtedness to thee? Art thou blind to the ill-use thou invitest upon thine own head in thy care for me? Let me imperil thee no more. Is there no other way?"

He shook his head. Slowly her face fell, and she sighed for very heaviness of spirit. Atsu stooped and took her hand.

"Make ready and let us leave this place," he said kindly, "and thou canst decide in the securer precincts of Memphis what thou wilt do. Lose no time." He turned away and, signing to Deborah to follow him, left the tent.

Rachel arose and began her preparations to depart. The formidable blockade in the way to safety seemed to clear and her heart leaped at the anticipation of freedom or stopped at the suggestion of failure. She hastened slowly, for her excitement made most of her movements vain. Her hands trembled and held things insecurely; she forgot the place of many of her belongings, in that humble, orderly house. Alternately praying and fearing, she stopped now and then to be sure that the sounds of the camp were not those of the returning servants. The simple apparel gathered together, she collected the remaining mementoes of her family,—saved with so much pain and guarded with such diligence by old Deborah. These were trinkets of gold and ivory, bits of frail gauzes in which a wondrous perfume lingered, and a scroll of sheepskin bearing the records of the house. And after all these had been found and gathered together, she fur-

tively put the straw aside and drew forth the collar of golden rings.

With the first glint of light on the red metal, the hope and animation in her heart went out. What of Kenkenes? No thought came to her now, but the most unhappy. The obligations which she would have gladly laid on him had fallen to Atsu. She dared not confess to him her love, and she could not give him gratitude. He had entered her life like a bewildering radiance, but it was Atsu who had saved her and emancipated her and would save her again.

She thrust the collar into her bosom with a sob and went on mechanically with her preparations. But during one of her movements the coins clinked musically. She clutched them, and they rang again, softly. They reproached her, and in that irresistible way,—gently. They made a sound even as she breathed. As she walked they chafed. They took weight and crushed her breast. And with every sound from them, she felt Kenkenes' arm about her, her hand lost in his, the warmth of his young cheek against hers. Never so long as his gift were in her possession might she hope to put these memories from her, and she could not cherish them hopefully now. Desperate grief stirred her into action. She went quickly to the door of the tent and there met Deborah.

"This is not mine," she said, holding up the necklace. "It belongs to the young nobleman who brought me back to camp that night."

"Leave it with the tribe and it shall be given him."

"Nay, he may not return to camp. I know where he comes and I can leave it there. It is not far—only a little way."

Deborah stood in her path.

"Will he be there?" she demanded.

"Nay, that I can pledge thee." She slipped past her guardian, out of the tent and sped up the valley, determined that Deborah's prohibition, however just, should not stay her.

The old Israelite turned to look after her, and her eyes fell on Atsu, his face black with rage, his arms folded, talking with a fat, wildly gesticulating servitor. At that moment the courier caught sight of Rachel flying up the valley and, flinging a document at Atsu's feet, started to pursue. Atsu halted him with an iron hand, and Deborah paused to see no more. With a prayer she ran up the valley the way Rachel had taken.

CHAPTER XIX

IN THE DESERT

In the early morning of the next day after the rout at Senci's, Kenkenes wandered restlessly about the inner court of his father's house. He had slept but little the preceding night, and now, dizzy and irritable, the freshness of the morning did not invigorate him and the haunting perplexities were with him still.

There was no need of haste to the Arabian hills and yet he could not wait patiently in Memphis for an appropriate hour to visit Masaarah. He paced hither and thither, flung himself on the benches in the shade, only to rise and resume his uneasy walk. Anubis was omnipresent and particularly ungovernable. If his young master were in motion he vibrated and oscillated like a shuttle. If Kenkenes sat, he paced the tessellated pavement slowly and with a foot-fall lighter than a bird's. The sculptor eyed him understandingly, and finally arose.

"Come, Anubis! Tit, tit, tit!" he called, backing toward the work-room. Anubis bounded after him, but as Kenkenes paused just over the threshold, the ape also halted. His master retreated to the rear of the room still calling, but to the ape there was something portentously familiar in this proceeding. It

hinted of imprisonment. Turning as though pursued, he disappeared up an acacia tree from which he could not be dislodged. With a vexed exclamation, Kenkenes passed out of the court into the house, slamming the swinging door so sharply that it sprang open again after him. As the old portress put back the outer doors leading into the street, that her young master might go forth, a shadow quick as thought slipped out after him. The old portress clapped her hands with a shrill command but the shadow was gone.

Once more in his work-day dress, his wallet of tools and provisions across his shoulder, the young sculptor passed toward the Nile, moody and unhappy but determined. At the river-side he hired the shallow bari that had given him faithful service for so long, and receiving the oars from Sepet, the boatman, prepared to push away. At that moment, Anubis, tremulous but unrepentant, bounded in beside him.

"Anubis!" Kenkenes exclaimed. "Of a truth I believe thou art possessed of the arts of magic. Now, if thou art lost in the hills and devoured by a wolf, upon thine own head be it. Pull in that paw, before thou becomest a foolish sacrifice to the sacred crocodile. I wonder thy self-respect does not keep thee from coming when thou art unwelcome." And subsiding into silence, the sculptor turned toward Masaarah.

He made a landing below the stone wharf, for there a two-oared bari was already drawn up, and the tangle of herbage was a safe hiding-place for his own boat. He looked toward the quarry and hesitated. He had no heart yet to face her, who had laid his cruelest sorrow on him. He would continue his work on Athor

until he had gathered assurance from that unforbidding face.

His light foot made no sound and he entered the niche silently. Kneeling on the chipped stone at the base of the statue, her face against the drapings, her arms clasping its knees, was Rachel. In one hand was the collar of rings. She had not heard the sculptor's approach.

For an instant his surprise transfixed him. Had she repented? A great wave of compassion and tenderness swept over him and he drew her face away between his palms. With a terrified start, the girl turned a swift glance upward. When she recognized Kenkenes her tearful face colored vividly. Her posture was such that she could not rise, and with infinite gentleness he lifted her to her feet.

"What is it, Rachel? Art thou in trouble?"

Joy and maidenly confusion took away her voice.

"Alas," he went on sadly. "Am I so fallen from thy favor, shut out and denied thy confidence?"

"Nay, nay," she protested. "Think not so harshly of me. I am—I came—" she faltered and paused. He did not help or spare her. He had come to learn why she had done this thing, why she had said that, and why she had repulsed him without explanation, when there was unmistakable preference for him in her unstudied acts. He held his peace and waited for her to proceed. Meanwhile Rachel suffered cruelly. She had no thought in her mind concerning her conduct toward him. It was the shameful event of the morning, which must be told to explain her presence before Athor, that made her cover her crimson face at last. Kenkenes silenced the protests of his gal-

lantry, and drawing her hands away, lifted her face on the tips of his fingers and waited.

While they stood thus, Deborah, exhausted and praying, staggered into the inclosure.

"Rachel!" she panted. "The serving-men—thou art pursued!" The fat courier, purple of countenance and breathing hard, appeared in the opening. Rachel shrank against Kenkenes and Deborah dropped on her knees between the pair and the servitor.

"Out of the way, hag!" the man puffed. "Let me at yon slave. Out!" He struck at Deborah with a short mace but Kenkenes caught his arm and thrust him aside.

"Go, go back to the camp," he said to the old woman. "No harm shall befall Rachel." Raising her, he put her behind him, and advanced toward the courier.

"Hast thou words with me?" he said coolly. "What wilt thou?"

"The girl. Give her up!"

"Nay, but thou art peremptory. What wilt thou with her?"

"For the harem of the Pharaoh's chief adviser," the man retorted.

The blood in Kenkenes' veins seemed to become molten; flashes of fierce light blinded him and his sinews hardened into iron. He bounded forward and his fingers buried themselves in soft and heated flesh.

The first glimmer of reason through his murderous insanity was the consciousness of a rain of blows upon his head and shoulders, and a blackening face settling back to the earth before him.

He released his grip on the throat of the strangling servitor and flung off his other assailants. For a

moment, stunned by the hard usage at the hands of the reinforcing men, he staggered, and seemed about to succumb. The men pursued him to finish their work, but as he eluded them, it seemed that a third person—a woman all in white with extended arms—came into their view.

Kenkenes saw the foremost, a tall Nubian in a striped tunic, stop in his tracks, and the second, smaller and lighter but a Nubian also, following immediately behind, bumped against his fellow.

Mouths agape, eyes staring, they stood and marveled. The strange presence, they discovered at once, was neither a human being nor an apparition. It was stone—a statue.

"Sacrilege!" the first exploded. "A—a—by Amen, it is the slave herself!"

In the little pause, Kenkenes recovered himself, but he knew that he gave Rachel to her fate, if the pair overcame him. He caught her hand and with the whispered word, "Run!" fled with her toward the front of the cliff facing the Nile. It was a desperate chance for escape but he seized it.

Immediately they were pursued and at the brink of the hill, overtaken. The stake was too large for the young artist to risk its loss by adhering to the unwritten rules of combat. He released Rachel, whirled about, and as the foremost descended on him, ducked, seized the man about the middle, and pitched him head-first down into the valley. The second, the tall Nubian that wore the striped tunic, halted, dismayed, and Kenkenes, catching Rachel's hand, prepared to descend. But she checked him with a cry. "Look!"

His eyes followed her outstretched arm. At regular intervals along the Nile, the distant figures of men were seen posted. Escape was cut off. He mounted to the top of the cliff and led Rachel out of view from the river. The second man retreated, and raged from afar. The sculptor turned up the shingly slope toward the sun-white ridge of higher hills inland. Here, he would hide with Rachel, till his strength returned and the ache left his head clear to plan a safe escape. The Nubian called on all the gods to annihilate them and started in pursuit. The sculptor did not pause, and, emboldened by the indifference of the man he dogged, the pursuer drew near and made menacing demonstrations. Kenkenes had no desire to be followed. He bade Rachel wait for him and approached the Nubian.

"Now," he began coolly, "thou art unwelcome, likewise, insolent. Also art thou a fool, but it is an archidiot indeed that lacketh caution. This maiden is beloved of all the Israelites. Thou art one man, and alone. It would not be safe for thee to attempt to take her without help even across that little space between Masaarah and the Nile. I should harass thee with others within call. Do thou save thyself and send the chief adviser after her. I would treat with him also."

The Nubian backed away and Kenkenes followed him relentlessly until the man, overcome with trepidation, took to his heels and fled.

Even then, Kenkenes did not lessen his vigilance. He caught up Anubis, who had bounded beside him during the entire time, and running back to Rachel, turned into the limestone wastes.

Kenkenes had risked his suggestions to the single Nubian, and their effect upon him gave the young

sculptor some hope that the pursuing force had been limited to these three. Though the men along the Nile were not within call, they would prevent flight into Memphis, and the camp of the Israelites, if not similarly picketed, would offer security only for the moment. Why had not the Hebrews protected her in the beginning? He would get to a place of perfect safety first and learn all concerning this matter.

After an hour's cautious dodging from shelter to shelter, through the masses of rocks, they toiled up the great ridge of hills deep into the desert. Rachel would have gone on and on, but Kenkenes drew her into the shadow of a great rock and stopped to listen. The oppressive silence was unbroken. Far and near only gray wastes of hills heaved in heated solitude about them.

"Sit here in the shadow and rest," he said, turning to the weary girl beside him. "I shall keep watch."

He cleared a space for her among the debris at the base of the great fragment and pressed her down in the place he had made. Next he undid his belt and fastened Anubis to a boulder, too heavy for the ape to move. The animal resented the confinement, and Kenkenes, tying him by force, found in the forepaws the collar of golden rings. With a murmur of satisfaction, the young man reclaimed the necklace and thrust it into the bosom of his dress.

When he arose the day grew dark before him, and he was obliged to steady himself against the rock till the vertigo passed. His assailants had hurt him more than he had thought. But he took up his vigil and maintained it faithfully till all sense of danger had vanished.

Rachel, who had been watching his face, touched his hand at last, and bade him rest. The invitation was welcome and with a sigh he sank down beside her.

"Lie down," she said softly. "Thou hast been most cruelly misused. And all for me!"

Obediently, he slipped from a sitting to a recumbent posture. She put out her arm, and supporting him, seemed about to take his head into her lap. Instead, she slipped the mantle from the strap that bound it across his shoulders, and rolling it swiftly, made a pillow of it for his head.

The wallet that had hung by the same strap over his shoulder, attracted her attention and she guessed that it had been used as a carrier for provision. She laid it open and took out the water-bottle. The pith-stopper had held, during all the violent motion, and the dull surface of the porous and ever-cooling pottery was cold and wet.

She put the bottle to his lips and, after he had drunk, bathed his bruises most tenderly.

Succumbing to the gentle influence of her fingers, he put up his hands to take them, but they moved out of his reach in the most natural manner possible. He could not feel that she had purposely avoided his touch, but he made no further attempt when the soothing fingers returned. Finally he raised himself on his elbow and supported his head in his hand.

"Now am I new again," he said; "once more ready to help thee. Let us take counsel together and get into safety and comfort." He paused a moment till his serious words would not follow with unseeming promptness upon his light tone.

"I know thy trouble, Rachel," he began again sober-

ly. "There is no need that thou shouldst hurt thyself by the telling. But there are details which would be helpful in aiding thee if I had them in mind. Thou knowest better than I. Wilt thou aid me?"

Her golden head drooped till her face was bowed upon her hands. After a little silence she answered him, her voice low with shame.

"This man sought to take me before, at Pa-Ramesu, but Atsu learned of it in time and sent me to Masaarah. This morning I met him again—" She paused, and Kenkenes aided her.

"Aye, I can guess—poor affronted child!"

"Atsu meant to escape with me again, but the servants of the nobleman came before we could get away."

Kenkenes knew by her choice of words that she did not know the name of her persecutor, and he did not tell her what it was. He could not bear the name of Har-hat on her lips. She went on, after a little silence.

"I came—" she began, coloring deeply, "to leave thy collar with the statue—I did not expect to find thee there."

How little it takes to dispirit a lover! How could he know that any thought had led her to do that thing save an impulse actuated by indifference or real dislike? His hope was immediately reduced to the lowest ebb. The mention of the taskmaster's name brought forward the probability of a rival.

"I can take thee back to Atsu," he said slowly. "These menials will not remain in the hills after sunset, and under cover of night I can slip thee, by strategy, past any sentries they may have set and get thee to Atsu. I, by my sacrilege, and he by his insubordination,

are both under ban of the law, but danger with him will be sweeter danger than peril with me, I doubt not."

She looked at him, and the hurt that began to show on her face gave place to puzzlement.

"Is it not so?" he asked with a bitter smile. "The companionship of one's beloved works wonders out of heavy straits!"

"But—. Dost thou—? Atsu is naught to me," she cried, her grave face brightening.

The blood surged back to his cheeks and the life into his eyes. He leaned toward her, ready to ask for more enlightenment concerning her conduct, when she went on dreamily: "But he is wondrous kind and hath made the camp bright with his humanity. Israel loveth Atsu."

Kenkenes turned again to the perplexity in hand.

"I came this morning to ask thy permission to give thee thy freedom. I doubt not Israel of Masaarah, hidden in a niche in the hills, does not dream that it is the plan of the Pharaoh—nay, the heir to the crown of Egypt by the mouth of the Pharaoh—to exterminate the Hebrews." Rachel recoiled from him.

"What sayest thou?" she exclaimed, her voice sharp with terror.

"Nay, forgive me!" he said penitently. "So intent was I on thy rescue that I forgot to soften my words. Let it be. It is said; I would it were not true."

Her affright was only momentary, for her faith restored her ere his last words were spoken.

"It will not come to pass," she declared. "Jehovah will not suffer it. Thou shalt see—and let the Pharaoh beware!" Her words were vehement and she offered

no argument. She saw no need of it, since her belief, merely expressed, had the force of fact with her.

"I am committed to the cause of Israel—that thou knowest, Rachel," Kenkenes made answer. After another silence he took up the thread of his talk.

"If thy danger from this man were set aside I should not return thee to the camp, even if there were no doom spoken upon Israel. I would have thee free; I would have thee in luxury, sheltered in my father's house—I would—"

"Thou dost paint a picture that mocks me now, O Kenkenes," she broke in on his growing fervor. "Doubly am I enslaved, and the safety of Masaarah and Memphis is no more for me."

"Thou hast said," he answered in a subdued voice. "It was given me last night to win favor with the Pharaoh for thy sake, but the need of that favor fell before it was won. But I despair not. What is thy pleasure, Rachel? Shall I take thee to Atsu, or wilt thou stay with me?"

"This nobleman will know of a surety that Atsu is my friend, but he must guess the other Egyptian who hath helped me. If I go to Atsu I take certain danger to him; if I stay with thee the peril must wander ere it overtakes us. But I would not burden either. Is there no other way?"

He shook his head. "It lies between me and Atsu to care for you, and the peril for you and for us is equal. My name is as good as published, for I am gifted with a length of limb beyond my fellows. I was found before the statue and they, describing me to the priests, will prove to the priests, who know my calling, that

the son of Mentu has committed sacrilege. And the priesthood would not wait till dawn to take me."

"I will stay with thee, Kenkenes," she said simply.

He became conscious of the collar on his breast and drew it forth.

"With this," he began, assuming a lightness, "I fear I gave thee offense one day and thou hast held it against me. Now let me heal that wound and sweeten thy regard for me with this same offending trinket. Wilt thou take it as a peace-offering from my hands and wear it always?" She bent toward him and, with worshiping hands, he put aside the loosened braids and clasped the necklace about her throat.

"There are ten rings," he continued. "Let them be named thus," telling them off with his fingers. "This first of all—Hope—it shall be thy stay; this—Faith—it shall comfort thee; this—Good Works—it shall publish thee; this—Sacrifice—it shall win thee many victories; this—Chastity—it shall be thy name; the next—Wisdom—it shall guide thee; after it—Steadfastness—it shall keep thee in all these things; Truth—it shall brood upon thy lips; Beauty—it shall not perish; this, the last, is Love, of which there is naught to be said. It speaketh for itself."

Their eyes met at his last words and for a moment dwelt. Then Rachel looked away.

"Are the fastenings secure?" she asked.

"Firm as the virtues in a good woman's soul."

"They will hold. I would not lose one of them."

A long silence fell. The curious activity of desert-life, interrupted for the time by the presence of the fugitives, resumed its tenor and droned on about them.

The rasping grasshopper, the darting lizard, the scorpion creeping among the rocks, a high-flying bird, a small, skulking, wild beast put sound and movement in the desolation of the region. The horizon was marked by undulating hills to the west; to the east, by sharper peaks. The scant growth was blackened or partly covered with sand, and it fringed the distant uplands like a stubbly beard. The little ravines were darkened with hot shadows, but the bald slopes presented areas, shining with infinitesimal particles of quartz and mica, to a savage sun and an almost unendurable sky. From somewhere to the barren north the wind came like a breath of flame, ash-laden and drying. There was nothing of the cool, damp river breeze in this. They were in the hideous heart of the desert to whom death was monotony, resisting foreign life, an insult.

The two in the shortening shadow of the great rock were glad of the water-bottle. The necessity of comfortable shelter for Rachel began to appeal urgently to Kenkenes. He put aside his dreams and thought aloud.

"What cover may I offer thy dear head this night?" he began. "We may not return to the camp, for there of a surety they lie in wait for us. Toora is deserted and so tempting a spot for fugitives that it will be searched immediately. Not a hovel this side of the Nile but will be visited. I would take thee to my father—"

"Nay," she said firmly. "I will take affliction to none other. Already have I undone two of the best of Egypt. I will carry the distress no further."

After a silence he began again.

"How far wilt thou trust in me, Rachel?"

She raised her face and looked at him with serious eyes.

"In all things needful which thou wilt require of me."

"And thou canst sleep this night in an open boat?"

She nodded.

"To-morrow, then," he continued, taking her hand, "we shall reach Nehapehu, where I can hide thee with some of the peasantry on my father's lands. And there thou canst abide until I go to Tape and return.

"Thou must know," he continued, explaining, "the Athor of the hills is not my first sacrilege. Once I committed a worse. My father was the royal sculptor to Rameses and is now Meneptah's murket." Rachel glanced at him shyly and sought to withdraw her hand, for she recognized the loftiness of the title. But he retained his clasp. "He is a mighty genius. He planned and executed Ipsambul. For that, which is the greatest monument to Rameses, the Incomparable Pharaoh loved him, and while the king lived my father was overwhelmed with his favors. Nor did the royal sculptor's good fortune wane, as is the common fate of favorites, for the great king planned that my father's house should be honored even after his death though the dynasties change. So Rameses gave him a signet of lapis lazuli, and its inscription commanded him who sat at any time thereafter on the throne of Egypt to honor the prayer of its bearer in the unspeakable name of the Holy One.

"After the death of Rameses," the narrator went on, "we went to Tape, my father and I, to inscribe the hatchments and carve the scene of the Judgment of the

Dead in the tomb of the great king. Now, I am my father's only child and have been taught his craft. I have been an apt pupil, and he had no fear in trusting me with the execution of the fresco. I had long been in rebellion, practising in secret my lawless ideas, and I was seized with an uncontrollable aversion to marring those holy walls with the conventional ugliness commanded by the ritual. I assembled my ideas and dared. I worked rapidly and well. The work was done before my father discovered it." Kenkenes paused and laughed a little.

"Suffice it to say the fresco was erased. And the solemnity of the crypt was hardly restored before my father found that his sacred signet, which he always wore, was gone. Nay, nay, I might not search for it more than the fruitless once, for he declared, and of a truth believed firmly, that the great king had reclaimed his gift. I did not and never have I believed it. Now I need the signet and I shall go after it on the strength of that belief.

"Having found it, I shall appeal to Meneptah for thy liberty and safety and whatever boon thou wouldst have and for myself. What thinkest thou? Shall I go on?"

Rachel smiled and looked up at him gratefully.

"I will go with thee, Kenkenes," she said.

Her ready confidence and the easiness of his name on her lips filled him with joy. "Ah! ye ungentle Hathors!" he mourned to himself, "why may I not tell her how much I love her?"

But the white hand which he pressed against his breast asked its release with gentle reluctance, and he set it free.

Once again the silence fell and was not frequently broken thereafter.

There was no invitation in her manner, and he could not speak what he would.

The sun dropped behind the Libyan hills and the heights filled with shadow. At length he said:

"It is time."

Lifting her to her feet, the ape attending them, he went toward the Nile, hand in hand with Rachel, his love all untold.

CHAPTER XX

THE TREASURE CAVE

The sudden night had just fallen, and there was an incomplete moon in the west. But already the desert was full of feeble shadows and silver interspaces, and all that tense silence of evening upon unpeopled localities.

Kenkenes stood upon the top of a huge monolith, listening. Below, with only her face in the faint moonlight, was Rachel, looking up to him. Anubis, oppressed by the voiceless expectancy of the two young people, crouched at his master's feet. For a while there was only the ringing turmoil of his own quickened blood in the young man's ears. But presently, up from the southern slope, rose the sound he had heard some minutes before—a long, quavering note, ending in a high eery wail.

Kenkenes was familiar with the screams of wild beasts, and he knew the irreconcilable differences between them and the human voice. Instantly he sent back across the hollow a strong reply that the startled echoes repeated again and again. Almost immediately the first cry was repeated, but a desperate power had entered into it. Kenkenes dropped from his point of vantage.

"Some one calleth, of a surety," he said, "and by the voice, it is a woman."

"It is Deborah come up from the camp to seek for me!" Rachel exclaimed.

"I doubt not. But the gods are surely with her, to fend the beasts from her in this savage place. It is well we came this way."

With all the haste possible on the rough slope, they descended. The ground was familiar to Kenkenes, for the niche was near the foot of the declivity.

Half-way down he called again, and the answer came up from the hiding-place of Athor. In another moment they were within and beside the prostrate form of the old Israelite. Rachel dropped on her knees, crying out in her solicitude. Her words were in the soft language of her own people and unintelligible to Kenkenes, but her voice trembled with concern. The old woman answered soothingly and at some length. The narrative was frequently broken by low exclamations from Rachel, and at its end the girl turned to Kenkenes with a sob of anger.

"The Lord God break them in pieces and His fury be upon them!" she cried. "They set upon her and beat her and left her to the jackals!"

"Set consume them!" Kenkenes responded wrathfully. "How came they upon you? Did you not return to camp?"

"Nay, the mother heart in me would not suffer me to desert Rachel. I stayed without this place, and ye outstripped me when ye fled. After a time the fat servitor, rousing out of his swoon, came forth from here, and another, who had been lurking in the rocks, joined him, and the pair, in searching for you, dis-

covered me and beat me with maces, leaving me for dead."

After a grim silence, broken only by the low weeping of Rachel, Kenkenes bade her continue.

"The search they made for you was not thorough, for one was ill and both were afraid. But they came upon the statue again, and the sight of it mocked them, so they overthrew it and broke it."

Kenkenes drew a sharp breath and glanced at the place where Athor should have been. Except for themselves, the niche was evidently vacant. The old woman continued:

"Then they descended into the camp of Israel. After a time I heard the sound of voices as if there were many men in the hills, and the heart of me was afraid. With much pain and travail I crept into this place, and here sounds come but faintly. But I heard sufficient to know that there were many who sought diligently, but whether they were our own people or the minions of thine enemy, Rachel, I could not with safety discover."

"Said they aught concerning their intents—this pair, who set upon you?" Kenkenes asked.

"O, aye, they blustered, and if they bring half of their threats to pass, it will go ill with thee, Egyptian. They will set the priests upon thee immediately; the hills will be searched; the Nile will be picketed. It behooves thee to have a care for thyself. As for Rachel, I know not what will become of her. She is penned out in the desert, for the camp is to be watched, and they boast that the hunt will end only with her capture."

"Let them look to it that it does not end with the

choking of the swine who inspired it! I long to put him beyond the cure of leeches."

He made no answer to Deborah's words concerning Rachel's plight. Deborah had disarranged his plans. He could not take the old woman, grievously wounded, on the long journey to Nehapehu, and, indeed, had she been well, his small boat might not hold together with a burden of three for a distance of half a hundred miles. For a moment his perplexity baffled his ingenuity.

It occurred to him that he might cross to the Memphian shore and procure a larger boat; but what would protect his helpless charges during the hours of absence, or in case he were taken? He realized that he dare not run a risk; his every movement must be safe and sure. He could not ask the wounded Israelite to return to the camp now, seeing that she had suffered mistreatment at the hands of Har-hat's servants and deserted not.

"If there were but a grotto in the rocks—a cave or a tomb—" he stopped and smote his hands together. "By Apis! I have it—the Tomb of the Discontented Soul!"

He turned to the two women, who had talked softly together in Hebrew, and spoke lightly in his relief.

"We have shelter for this night—safer than any other place in all Egypt. Trouble no more concerning that. Let me hide my sacrilege and rob them of indisputable evidence against me, and then we shall get to our refuge."

He lifted Deborah in his arms, and bearing her out into the open, left her with Rachel.

Then he reëntered the shadowy niche. The night

was not too dark to show the interior. Athor, a torso, broken in twain, headless, armless, was prostrate. It had been pushed over against the great cube that sheltered it and the fall against the hard limestone had ruined it. Kenkenes clenched his hands and choked back the angry tears. To the artist the destruction partook of the heinousness of murder, of the pathos of death. He set about concealing the wreck with all speed, for he wished to be merciful to his eyes.

He collected the fragmentary members, and carrying them down the slope a little way, dug a grave for them in the sand. To the trench he rolled the trunk on the tamarisk cylinders, and buried all that was left of Athor the Golden. Over the grave he laid a flat stratum of rock that the wind might not uncover the ruin.

Returning to the niche, he took up the matting with its weight of chipped stone, and went down through the dark to the line of rocks opposite the quarries. There he permitted the rubble to slide with a mixture of earth, like a natural displacement, into the talus, of a similar nature, at the base of the cliff. The matting he shook and laid aside. It would serve for a bed in the tomb that night.

Then he destroyed the north wall. In the four months of its existence the sand had banked against it more than half its height. Each stone removed in the dismantling was carried away to a new place, until the whole fortification was, as once it had been, scattered up and down the slope. The light, dry sand he pitched with his wooden shovel against the great cube until it all lay where the wind would have piled it had no second wall stood in its way. By dawn the strong breeze

from the north would cover every footprint and shovel-mark to a level once more. He went again to the line of rocks and threw the shovel with a sure aim and a strong arm into the quarries across the valley. To-morrow it would seem that an Israelite had forgotten one of his tools.

The work was done.

With an ache in his heart, Kenkenes returned to Deborah and Rachel.

"The shelter for us is in the cliff to the north, near Toora," he began immediately. "It is a tomb, but others before us have partaken of the dead's hospitality."*

"How am I to reach it?" Deborah asked. "Is the place far?"

"A good hour's journey, but we go by water. Still, we must walk to the Nile."

"That I can not do," the old woman declared.

"Nay, but I can carry you," Kenkenes replied, bending over her. She shrank away from him.

"Thou hast forgotten," she protested.

"Not so," he insisted stoutly. Taking her up, he settled her on one strong arm against his breast. The free hand he extended to Rachel, who had taken the matting, and together they went laboriously down the steep front of the hill. They proceeded cautiously, watching before and behind them lest they be surprised.

He had covered his boat well with the tangle of

*The tombs of the Orient in ancient times were common places of refuge for fugitives, lepers and outcasts.

sedge and marsh-vines, and after a long space of search, he found it.

Once again he lifted Deborah and laid her in the bottom of the boat. With its triple burden, the bari sank low in the water, but Kenkenes wielded the oars carefully. The faint moonlight showed him the way. Now and then a red glimmer across the grain marked the location of a farmer's hut, but there was no other sign of life. Even at the Memphian shore there was little activity.

When the line of cultivation ended Kenkenes knew he was in the precincts of the Marsh of the Discontented Soul. He rowed across what he believed to be one-half of its width and drew into the reeds. The sound and movement awoke many creatures, which hurried away in the dark, and something slid off into the river with a splash. The lapping of the ripples sounded like a drinking beast. Kenkenes put a bold foot on the soggy sand and stepped out. Rachel followed him with bated breath. Anubis unceremoniously mounted his shoulder. He dragged the bari far up on the shore, once more lifted Deborah and started up the warm sand.

At the base of the limestone cliff he deposited his burden and brought together a little heap of dried reeds and flag blades. This he fired after many failures by striking together his chisel and a stone. Rachel hid the blaze from the Nile while he made and lighted a torch of twisted reeds and stamped out the fire. In the feeble moonlight he discerned a stairway of rough-hewn steps leading into a cavity in the wall. The southern side of the ascent was sheltered by an outstanding buttress of rock.

He put the torch into Rachel's hand, and, taking up Deborah, climbed a dozen steps to a dark opening half-closed by a fallen door. Pushing the obstruction aside with his foot, he entered. When they were all within he closed the entrance and unrolled the reeds.

There was a helter-skelter of mice past them and a rustle of retiring insects. The torch blazed brightly and showed him a squat copper lamp on the floor of the outer chamber. The vessel contained sandy dregs of oil and a dirty floss of cotton. With an exclamation of surprise Kenkenes lighted the wick, and after a little sputtering, it burned smokily.

"Nay, now, how came a lamp in this tomb?" he asked without expecting an answer.

The chamber was low-roofed and small—the whole interior rough with chisel-marks. To the eyes of the sculptor, accustomed to the gorgeous frescoes in the tombs of the Memphian necropolis, the walls looked bare and pitiful. There were several prayers in the ancient hieroglyphics, but no ancestral records or biographical paintings. Several strips of linen were scattered over the floor, with the customary litter of dried leaves, dust, refuse brought by rodents, cobwebs and the cast-off chrysalides of insects. In one corner was a bronze jar. Kenkenes examined it and found it contained cocoanut-oil for burning.

"Of a truth this is intervention of the gods," he commented, a little dazed, but filling his lamp nevertheless.

Ahead of him was a black opening leading into the second chamber. He stooped, and entering, held the lamp above his head. He cried out, and Rachel came to his side.

In the center of the room was a stone sarcophagus of the early, broad, flat-topped pattern. In one corner was a two-seated bari, in another a mattress of woven reeds. Leaning against the sarcophagus was a wooden rack containing several earthenware amphoræ; on the floor about it was a touseled litter of waxed outer cerements torn from mummies. All these things they observed later. Now their wide eyes were fixed on the top of the coffin. At one time there had been a dozen linen sacks set there, but the mice and insects had gnawed most of them away. The bottoms and lower halves yet remained, forming calyxes, out of which tumbled heaps of gold and silver rings, zones, bracelets, collars and masks from sarcophagi—all of gold; images of Isis in lapis lazuli and amethyst; scarabs in garnets and hematite, Khem in obsidian, Bast in carnelian, Besa in serpentine, signets in jasper, and ropes of diamonds which had been Babylonian gems of spoil.

"The plunder of Khafra and Sigur, by my mummy!" Kenkenes ejaculated.

"Will they return?" Rachel asked, in a voice full of fear.

"They are gathered to Amenti for their misdeeds many months agone," he explained. "See how thickly the dust lies here without a print upon it. They were tomb-robbers. None of the authorities could discover their hiding-place, and lo! here it is."

He walked round the sarcophagus and found at the head, on the floor, several bronze cases sealed with pitch. He opened one of them with some difficulty. Flat packages wrapped with linen lay within.

"Dried gazelle-meat,—and I venture there is wine in

those amphoræ. They lived here, I am convinced, and fed upon the food offerings they filched from the tombs. Was there ever such intrepid lawlessness?"

"Here is a snare and net," Rachel reported.

"Did they not profit by superstition? As long as they were here they were safe. They did not fear the spirit."

"The spirit?" Deborah, still in the outer chamber, repeated with interest.

"The spirit of this tomb," Kenkenes explained, returning to her. In a few words he told her the story as Hotep had told it to him.

"Canst thou discover the name?" she asked when he had finished.

"The sarcophagus is plain. There is no inscription within yonder crypt, for I have this moment looked. But let me examine this writing here by the door."

After a while he spoke again. "The name is not given. It says only this:

'The Spouse to Potiphar,
Captain of the Royal Guard to
Apepa, Child of the Sun,
In the Twelfth Year of Whose Luminous Reign
She Died.
Rejected by the Forty-two at On, because of
Unchastity,
She Lies Here,
Until Admitted to the Divine Pardon of Osiris.'"

"Aye, I know," Deborah responded. "It is history to the glory of a son of Abraham. Him, who brought our people here, she would have tempted, but he would

have none of her. Therefore she bore false witness against him and he was thrust into prison.

"But the God of Israel does not suffer for ever His chosen to be unjustly served, and he was finally exalted over Upper and Lower Mizraim. And honor and long life and a perfumed memory are his, and she—lo! she hath done one good thing. Her house hath become a shelter for the oppressed and for that may she find peace at last."

Kenkenes looked at the old woman with admiring eyes. The quaint speech of the Hebrews had always fascinated him, but now it had become melody in his ears. In this, the first moment of mental idleness since midday, he had time to think on Deborah. He knew that he had seen her before, and now he remembered that it was she who had transfixed him with a look on an occasion when Israel had first come to Masaarah.

But he did not remind her of the incident. Instead, he set about counteracting any effect that might follow should her memory, unaided, recall the occurrence. He had put her down on the matting, and the running spiders and slower insects worried her.

"A murrain on the bugs," he said. "We shall have a creepy night of it. Let us bottle this treasure and lay the mattress out of their reach on the sarcophagus. Endure them a while, Deborah, till we make thee a refuge."

He set the lamp in the opening from the outer into the inner crypt and entered the second chamber. Rachel followed him, and the old Israelite watched them with brilliant eyes.

Kenkenes swept the jewels as if they had been almonds into an empty amphora and returned it to the

rack. The mattress he laid upon the broad top of the sarcophagus.

"A line of oil run around the coffin will keep the insects away," Rachel ventured. Kenkenes returned to the outer chamber for the jar of oil, but Rachel took it from him.

"Let me be thy handmaid," she said softly.

He did not protest, and she reëntered the crypt.

"Luckily the mattress is large enough for the two of you," Kenkenes observed to Deborah, "but it will be hard sleeping."

"The Hebrews are not spoiled with couches of down," she replied.

"There are enough of the wrappings in yonder to take off the hardness, but even with the matting over them they will be gruesome things to sleep upon. They would bewitch your dreams. But mayhap ye will not suffer from one night's discomfort."

"Where go we to-morrow?"

Kenkenes did not answer immediately. Another plan for Rachel's security had been growing in his mind, and his heart leaped at the prospect of its acceptance by her.

"There is a large boat here, and we might go to On," he began at last. "There is one way possible to save Rachel from this man as long as I live, and I would she were to be persuaded into accepting the conditions."

"Name them and let me judge."

He hesitated for proper words and his cheeks flushed. Deborah looked at him with comprehension in her gaze.

"Rachel is not blind to my love for her, and thou,

too, art discerning. Yet I would declare myself. I love Rachel, and I would take her to wife. Then, not even the Pharaoh could take her from me by law."

Deborah raised herself with difficulty, and after peering into the inner chamber to see where Rachel was, approached him softly.

"Thou lovest Rachel. Aye, that is a tale I have heard oftener than I have fingers to count upon. From the first men of her tribe I have heard it, from the best of Egypt and the worst. But she kept her heart and stayed by my side. Now thou comest, young, comely, gifted with fair speech and full of fervor. Thou lovest as she would be loved, and her heart goes out to thee, even as thou wouldst have it—in love."

Kenkenes' face glowed and his fine eyes shone with joy.

"But mark thou!" she continued passively. "If thou wouldst save her, think upon some other way, for thou mayest not wed her. Jehovah planteth the faith of Abraham anew in Israel. In Rachel and in Rachel's house it died not during the hundred years of the bondage. Therefore the name is godly. Of her, what would thy heart say? Hath she not beauty, hath she not wisdom, hath she not great winsomeness? There is none like her in these days among all the children of Abraham. To her Israel looketh for example, for, since she compelleth by her grace, those who behold her will consider whatever she doeth as good. Great is the reward of him who can direct and directeth aright, but shall he not appear abominable in the sight of the Lord if he useth his power to lead astray? Lo! if she wed thee, to her people it will seem that she would say: 'Behold, this man is fair in my sight, and

it is good for the chosen of the Lord to take the idolater into his bosom.' There is a multitude in Israel, which, like sheep, follow blindly as they are led. Great will be the labor to engrave the worship of the Lord God in their hearts, when all the powers of Israel shall strive to do that thing for them. How shall there be any success if Moses and the appointed of the Lord bid them worship, while the husband or wife that dwelleth in their tent saith 'Worship not'? To these, Rachel's marriage with thee would be justification and incentive to incline toward idolaters and idols. Then there are the wise and discerning who know that Rachel hath turned away from the best among her people. How, then, shall she be fallen in their sight if she wed with an idolater?

"She knoweth all these things and she keepeth a firm hold upon herself, but she hath not said these things to thee lest her strength fail her."

And thus was the mystery explained to him.

"Thou bowest down to a beetle," she went on without pausing. "Thou worshipest a cat; thou offerest up sacrifice to an image and conservest abominable and heathen rites. Thou art an idolater, and as such thou art not for Rachel. And yet, this further: if thou canst become a worshiper of the true God, thou shalt take her. Never have I seen an Egyptian won over to the faith of Abraham, but there approacheth a time of wonders and I shall not marvel."

To Egypt its faith was paramount. Israel in its palmiest days was not more vigilantly, jealously fanatical than Egypt. Every worshiper was a zealot; every ecclesiast an inquisitor. Church and State were inseparably united; law was fused with religion; sci-

ence and the arts were governed by hieratic canons. The individual ate, slept and labored in the name of the gods, and national matters proceeded as the Pantheon directed by the ecclesiastical mouthpiece.

Life was an ephemeral preface to the interminable and actual existence of immortality. Temporal things were transient and only of probationary value. The tomb was the ultimate and hoped-for, infinite abiding-place.

To the ideal Osirian his faith was the essential fiber in the fabric of his existence, to withdraw which meant physical and spiritual destruction. The forfeiture of his faith for Rachel, therefore, appealed to Kenkenes as a demand upon his blood for his breath's sake. His plight was piteous; never were alternatives so apparently impossible.

At first there was no coherent thought in the young man's mind. His consciousness seemed to be full of rebellion, longing and amazement. Never in his life had he been refused anything he greatly desired, when he had justice on his side. Now he was rejected, not for a shortcoming, but, according to his religious lights, for a virtue instead. His gaze searched the visible portion of the other chamber and found Rachel. In the half-light he saw that she had cast herself down against the sarcophagus, face toward the stone, her whole attitude one of weary depression.

Piteous as was the sight, there was comfort in it for him. Rachel loved him so much that she was bowed with the conflict between her love and her duty. His manhood reasserted itself. Love in youth bears hope with it in the face of the most hopeless hindrances. With the blood of the Orient in his veins and the fire

of youth to heighten its ardor, he was not to be wholly and for ever cast down. Furthermore, there was Rachel to be comforted.

He turned to Deborah.

"Let it pass, then. Deny me not the joy of loving her, nor her the small content of loving me. If there should be change, let it be in thy prohibitions, not in our love. Enough. Art thou weary? Wouldst thou sleep?"

"Nay," she answered bluntly.

"Then I would take counsel with thee. Thou knowest the end of Israel?" he asked.

"I know the purpose of the Pharaoh, but there is no end to Israel."

"Not yet, perchance," he said calmly, "or never. But we shall not put trust in auguries. The oppression of the people is already begun at Pa-Ramesu and the brick-fields. Ye shall not return to those dire hardships. Ye can not return to Masaarah. In Memphis I offer my father's house, but Rachel refuses it. In Nehapehu there is safety among the peasantry on the murket's lands. My father lost an all-powerful signet in the tomb of the Incomparable Pharaoh at Tape, and did not search for it because he believed that Rameses had taken it away from him. The king will honor it and grant whatever petition I make to him. If ye are unafraid to abide in this tomb for the few remaining hours of this night I shall take you to Nehapehu at dawn. There ye can abide till I go to Tape and return. What sayest thou?"

The old woman looked at him quietly for a moment.

"Is this place safe?" she asked.

"The forty-two demons of Amenti could not drive an Egyptian into this tomb."

"How comes it that thou art not afraid?"

"I have no belief in spirits."

"Nor have we. Why need we go hence? We shall abide here till thou shalt return."

"In this place!" Kenkenes exclaimed, recoiling. "Nay! I shall be gone sixteen days at least."

"We shall not fear to live in a tomb, we who have defied untombed death daily. We shall remain here."

"This hole—this cave of death!"

"We have shelter, and by thine own words none will molest us here. We are not spoiled with soft living, nor would we take peril to any. Without are fowls, herbs, roots, water—within, security, meat and wine. We shall not fear the dead whom, living, Joseph rebuked. We shall be content and well housed."

"But thou art wounded," he essayed.

She scouted his words with heroic scorn. "Nay, let us have no more. If thou canst accomplish this thing for Rachel, do it with a light heart, for we shall be safe. If thou art successful, Israel will rise up and call thee blessed; if thou failest, the sons of Abraham will still remember thee with respect."

No humility, no cringing gratitude in this. Queen Hatasu, talking with her favorite general, could not have commended him in a more queenly way.

To Kenkenes it seemed that their positions had been reversed. He craved to serve them and they suffered him.

"I shall go then to-night," he said simply.

"Nay, bide with us to-night, for thou art weary. There is no need for such haste."

He opened his lips to protest, his objections manifesting themselves in his manner. But she waved them aside.

"Thou hast the marks of hard usage upon thee," she said; "thou hast slaved for us since midday, and now the night is far spent. Thine eyes are heavy for sleep, thy face is weary. And before thee is a task which will require thy keenest wit, thy steadiest hand. Thou owest it to Rachel and to thyself to go forth with the eye of a hawk and the strength of a young lion."

Because of Rachel's name in her argument he yielded and turned immediately to the subject of their lonesome residence in the haunted tomb. "If aught befall me," he said, "for I am in the unknowable hands of the Hathors, disguise thyself and Rachel. If thou art skilled in altering thou canst find pigment among the roots of the Nile. Dye her hair and stain her face, take the boat and go to my father's house in Memphis. He is Mentu, the murket to the Pharaoh—a patriot and a friend to the kings. He knows not the Hebrews, but he is generous, hospitable and kind to the oppressed of whatever blood. Tell him Rachel's trouble and of me. I am his only child, and my name on thy lips will win thee the best of his board, the shelter of his roof, the protection of his right arm. Wait for me, however, in this place till a month hath elapsed.

"Keep the amphoræ filled with water, fresh every day, and preserve a stock of food within the tomb always to stand you in good stead if Rachel's enemy discover her hiding-place and besiege it."

His eyes ignited and his face grew white.

"Starve within this cave," he went on intensely, approaching her, "but deliver her not into his hands, I

charge thee, for the welfare of thy immortal soul. If thou art beset and there is no escape, before she shall live for the despoiler—take her life!"

Deborah scanned him narrowly, and when he made an end she opened her lips as though to speak. But something deterred her, and she moved away from him.

"Come, spread the matting, Rachel," she said. "The master will stay with us to-night."

Obediently the girl came, still white of face, but composed. She made a pallet of one roll of the matting, generously sprinkled the floor about it with oil to keep away the insects, put the lamp behind the amphora rack, hung her scarf over the frame that the light might not shine in her guest's eyes, and set the door a little aside to let the cool night air enter from the river. Having completed her service, she bade him a soft good-night and disappeared into the inner crypt, where Deborah had gone before her.

Kenkenes immediately flung himself upon the pallet because Rachel's hands had made it, and in a moment became acutely conscious of all the ache of body and the pain of soul the day had brought him. The first deprived him of comfort, the second of his peace, and there was the smell of dawn on the breeze before he fell asleep.

After sunset the next day Deborah roused him. He awoke restored in strength and hungry. The old Israelite had prepared some of the gazelle-meat for him, and this, with a draft of wine from an amphora, refreshed him at once. Provisions had been put in his wallet, and a double handful of golden rings, with several jewels, much treasure in small bulk, had been wrapped in a strip of linen and was ready for him.

By the time all preparations were complete the night had come.

He bade Deborah farewell and took Rachel's hand. It was cold and trembled pitifully. Without a word he pressed it and gave it back. He had reached the entrance, when it seemed that a suppressed sound smote on his ears, and he stopped. Deborah, her face grown stern and hard, had moved a step or two forward and stood regarding Rachel sharply. Neither saw her.

"Did you speak, Rachel?" Kenkenes asked. He fancied that her arms had fallen quickly as he turned.

"Nay, except to bid thee take care of thyself, Kenkenes," she faltered, "more for thine own sake than for mine."

He returned and, on his knee, pressed her hand to his lips.

"God's face light thee and His peace attend thee," she continued. The blessing was full of wondrous tenderness and music. He knew how her face looked above him; how the free hand all but rested on his head, and for a moment his fortitude seemed about to desert him. But she whispered:

"Farewell."

And he arose and went forth.

CHAPTER XXI

ON THE WAY TO THEBES

The moon was ampler and its light stronger. The Nile was a vast and faintly silvered expanse, roughened with countless ripples blown opposite the direction of the current. The north wind had risen and swept through the crevice between the hills with more than usual strength, adding its reedy music to the sound of the swiftly flowing waters.

After launching his bari, Kenkenes gazed a moment, and then, with a prayer to Ptah for aid, struck out for the south, rowing with powerful strokes.

At the western shore lighted barges swayed at their moorings or journeyed slowly, but the Nile was wide, and the craft, blinded by their own brilliance, had no thought of what might be hugging the Arabian shore. Yet Kenkenes, with the inordinate apprehension of the fugitive, lurked in the shadows, dashed across open spaces and imagined in every drifting, drowsy fisher's raft a pursuing party. He prayed for the well-remembered end of the white dike, where the Nile curved about the southernmost limits of the capital. The day had not yet broken when he passed the last flambeau burning at the juncture of the dike with the city wall. He rowed on steadily for Memphis, and immediate danger was at last behind him.

The towers of the city had sunk below the northern horizon when, opposite a poor little shrine for cowherds on the shore, a brazen gong sounded musically for the sunrise prayers. The Libyan hilltops were, at that instant, illuminated by the sun, and Kenkenes, in obedience to lifelong training, rested his oars and bent his head. When he pulled on again he did not realize that he had been, with the stubbornness of habit, maintaining the breach between him and Rachel. There was no thought in his mind to give over his faith.

At noon, weary with heat, hunger and heavy labor, he drew up at Hak-heb, on the western side of the Nile, fifty miles above Memphis. The town was the commercial center for the pastoral districts of the posterior Arsinoëite nome—Nehapehu. Here were brought for shipment the wine, wheat and cattle of the fertile pocket in the Libyan desert. Being at a season of commercial inactivity, when the farmers were awaiting the harvest, the sunburnt wharves were almost deserted.

Few saw Kenkenes arrive. Most of the inhabitants were taking the midday rest, and every moored boat was manned by a sleeping crew. He made a landing and went up through the sand and dust of the hot street to the only inn. Here he ate and slept till night had come again. Refreshed and invigorated, he continued his journey. At noon the next day he stopped to sleep at another town and to buy a lamp, materials for making fire, ropes and a plummet of bronze sufficiently heavy to anchor his boat. He was entering a long stretch of distance wherein there was no inhabited town, and he was making ready to sleep in the

bari. Then he began to travel by day, for he was too far from Memphis to fear pursuit, and rest in an open boat under a blazing sun would be impossible.

The third evening he paused opposite a ruined city on the eastern bank of the Nile. Hunters not infrequently went inland at this point for large game, and although the place was in a state of partial demolishment, Kenkenes hoped that there might be an inn. He tied his boat to a stake and entered Khu-aten,* the destroyed capital of Amenophis IV, self-styled Khu-n-Aten.

Here under a noble king, who loved beauty and had it not, the barbarous rites of the Egyptian religion were overthrown and sensuous and esthetic ceremonies were established and made obligatory all over the kingdom. In his blind groping after the One God, the king had directed worship to the most fitting symbol of Him—the sun.

He appeased the luminous divinity by offerings of flowers, regaled it with simmerings from censers, besought it with the tremulous harp and had it pictured with grace and vested with charm. And since the power of the national faith was all-permeating, its reconstruction was far-reaching in effect. Egypt was swept into a tremendous and beautiful heresy by a homely king, whose word was law.

But at his death the reaction was vast and vindictive. The orthodox faith reasserted itself with a violence that carried every monument to the apostasy and the very name of the apostate into dust. Now the remaining houses of Khu-aten were the homes of the

*Khu-aten—Tel-el-Amarna.

fishers—its ruins the habitation of criminals and refugees.

The hand of the insulted zealot, of the envious successor, of the invader and conqueror, had done what the reluctant hand of nature might not have accomplished in a millennium. The ruins showed themselves, stretching afar toward and across the eastern sky, in ragged and indefinable lines. The oblique rays of the newly risen moon slanted a light that was weird and ghostly because it fell across a ruin. Kenkenes climbed over a chaos of prostrate columns, fallen architraves and broken colossi, and the sounds of his advance stirred the rat, the huge spider, the snake and the hiding beast from the dark debris. Here and there were solitary walls standing out of heaps of wreckage, which had been palaces, and frequent arid open spaces marked the site of groves. In complex ramifications throughout the city sandy troughs were still distinguishable, where canals had been, and in places of peculiarly complete destruction the strips of uneven pavement showed the location of temples.

There was not a house at which Kenkenes dared to ask hospitality. Those that lived so precariously would have little conscience about stripping him of his possessions.

He retraced his steps to the wharves and drew away, prepared to spend the night in his boat.

After leaving Khu-aten, the Nile wound through wild country, the hills approaching its course so closely as to suggest the confines of a gorge. The narrow strip of level land on the eastern side lay under a receding shadow cast by the hills, but the river and the western shore were in the broad brilliance of the

moon. The night promised to be one of exceeding brightness and Kenkenes shared the resulting wakefulness of the wild life on land.

The half of his up-journey was done and the conflict of hope and doubt marshaled feasible argument for and against the success of his mission. In some manner the destruction of Khu-aten offered, in its example of Egypt's fury against progress, a parallel to his own straits.

In his boyhood he had heard the Pharaoh Khu-n-Aten anathematized by the shaven priests, and in the depths of his heart he had been startled to find no sympathy for their rage against the artist-king.

Ritual-bound Egypt had resented liberty of worship —a liberalism that lacked naught in zeal or piety, but added grace to the Osirian faith. In his beauty-worship, Kenkenes was not narrow. He would not confine it to glyptic art, nor indeed to art alone—all the uses of life might be bettered by it. His appreciation of Khu-n-Aten's ambition had been passive before, but when his own spirit experienced the same fire and the same reproach, his sympathy became hearty partizanship.

His mind wandered back again to the ruin. How fiercely Egypt had resented the schism of a Pharaoh, a demi-god, the Vicar of Osiris! The words of Rachel came back to him like an inspiration:

"Thou hast nation-wide, nation-old, nation-defended prejudice to overcome, and thou art but one, Kenkenes."

But one, indeed, and only a nobleman. Could he hope to change Egypt when a king might not? Behold, how he was suffering for a single and simple

breach of the law. At the thought he paused and asked himself:

"Am I suffering for the sacrilege?"

The admission would entail a terrifying complexity. If he were suffering punishment for the statue, what punishment had been his for the sacrilegious execution of the Judgment of the Dead in the tomb of Rameses II? What, other than the reclamation of the signet by the Incomparable Pharaoh, even as Mentu had said? If the hypothesis held, he had committed sacrilege, he had offended the gods, and might not the accumulated penalty be—O unspeakable—the loss of Rachel?

On the other hand, if the signet were still in the tomb, Rameses had not reclaimed it—Rameses had not been offended. The ritual condemned his act, but if Rameses in the realm of inexorable justice and supernal wisdom did not, how should he reconcile the threats of the ritual and the evident passiveness of the royal soul? If he found the signet and achieved his ends, aside from its civil power over him, what weight would the canonical thunderings have to his inner heart?

Once again he paused. The deductions of his free reasoning led him upon perilous ground. They made innuendoes concerning the stability of the other articles of hieratical law. He was startled and afraid of his own arguments.

"Nay, by the gods," he muttered to himself, "it is not safe to reason with religion."

But every stroke of his oar was active persistence in his heresy.

He believed he should find the signet.

Thereafter he could turn a deaf ear to any renegade ideas such an event might suggest.

It was an unlucky chance that befell the theological institutions of Egypt as far as this devotee was concerned, that Kenkenes had landed at the capital of the hated Pharaoh.

But he shook himself and tried to fix his attention on the night. The stars were few—the multitude obliterated by the moon, the luminaries abashed thereby. The light fell through a high haze of dust and was therefore wondrously refracted and diffused. The hills made high lifted horizons, undulating toward the east, serrated toward the west. In the sag between there was no human companionship abroad.

Throughout great lengths of shore-line the tuneless stridulation of frogs, the guttural cries of water-birds and the general movement in the sedge indicated a serene content among small life. But sometimes he would find silence on one bank for a goodly stretch where there was neither marsh-chorus nor cadences of insects. The hush would be profound and an affrighted air of suspense was apparent. And there at the river-brink the author of this breathless dismay, some lithe flesh-eater, would stride, shadow-like, through the high reeds to drink. Now and then the woman-like scream of the wildcat, or the harsh staccato laugh of the hyena would startle the marshes into silence. Sometimes retiring shapes would halt and gaze with emberous eyes at the boat moving in midstream.

Kenkenes admitted with a grim smile that the great powers of the world and the wild were against him. But Rachel's face came to him as comfort—the memory of it when it was tender and yielding—and with

a lover's buoyancy he forgot his sorrows in remembering that she loved him. He dropped the anchor and, lying down in the bottom of his boat, dreamed happily into the dawn.

During the day he landed for supplies at a miserable town of pottery-makers, leaving his boat at the crazy wharves.

When he returned the bari was gone. A negro, the only one near the river who was awake, told him that a dhow, laden with clay, in making a landing had struck the bari, staved in its side, upset it and sent it adrift.

The mischance did not trouble Kenkenes.

After some effort he aroused a crew of oarsmen, procured a boat, and continued at once to Thebes.

CHAPTER XXII

THE FAN-BEARER'S QUEST

At sunset on the day after the festivities at the Lady Senci's, Hotep deserted his palace duties and came to the house of Mentu. He had in mind to try again to persuade his friend from his folly, for the scribe was certain that Kenkenes was once more returning to his sacrilege and the Israelite.

The old housekeeper informed him that the young master was not at home, though he was expected even now.

Hotep waited in the house of his aunt, neighbor to the murket, and about the middle of the first watch asked again for Kenkenes.

Nay, the young master had not returned. But would not the noble Hotep enter and await him?

The scribe, however, returned to the palace, and put off his visit until the next day.

The following noon a page brought him a message from his aunt, the Lady Senci. It was short and distressed.

"Kenkenes has not returned, Hotep, and since he is known to have gone upon the Nile, we fear that disaster has overtaken him. Come and help the unhappy murket. His household is so dismayed that it is useless. Come, and come quickly."

The probability of the young artist's death in the Nile immediately took second place in the scribe's mind. Kenkenes had displayed to Hotep the effect of Rameses' savage boast to exterminate the Hebrews. It was that incident which had convinced the scribe that the Arabian hills would claim the artist on the morrow. He had not stopped to surmise the extremes to which Kenkenes would go, but his mysterious disappearance seemed to suggest that the lover had gone to the Israelitish camp to remain.

He made ready and repaired to the house of the murket. Mentu met him in the chamber of guests. By the dress of the great artist it would seem that he had returned at that moment from the streets.

Hotep sat down beside him, and with tact and well-chosen words told his story and summarized his narration with a mild statement of his suspicions.

There was no outbreak on the part of Mentu. But his broad chest heaved once, as though it had thrown off a great weight.

"But Kenkenes has been a dutiful son," he said after a silence. "I can not think he would use me so cruelly —no word of his intent or his whereabouts."

The objection was plausible.

"Then, let us go to Masaarah and discover of a surety," the scribe suggested.

When Atsu emerged from the mouth of the little valley into the quarries some time after the midday meal, he was confronted by the murket and the royal scribe. Neither of the men was unknown to him.

Hotep halted him.

"Was there a guest with the fair-haired Israelite maiden last night?" the scribe asked.

Atsu's face, pinched and darker than usual, blazed wrathfully.

"Have ye also joined yourselves with Har-hat to run that hard-pressed child to earth?" he exclaimed. "Do ye call yourselves men?"

"The gods forbid!" Hotep protested. "We do not concern ourselves with the maiden. It is the man who may be with her that we seek."

The taskmaster made an angry gesture, and Hotep interrupted again.

"I do not question her decorum, and the man of whom I speak is of spotless character. He is lost and we seek him."

"I can not help you; my wits are taxed in another search."

Hotep's face showed light at the taskmaster's words.

"Is she also gone?" he asked mildly. "Then let me give you my word, that the discovery of one will also find the other."

Atsu gazed with growing hope at the scribe.

"How is he favored?" he asked at last.

"He is tall, half a palm taller than his fellows; comely of countenance; young; in manner, amiable and courteous—."

Atsu interrupted him with a wave of his hand. "I saw him once—good three months agone, but not since."

The reply baffled Hotep for a moment. He realized that to find Kenkenes he must begin a search for Rachel.

"Good Atsu, he whom we seek is a friend to the maiden. He is much beloved by me—by us. Whom-

soever he befriendeth we shall befriend. Wilt thou tell us when and from whom the maiden fled?"

Atsu had become willing by this time. This amiable young noble might be able to lift the suspense that burdened his unhappy heart.

"Har-hat—Set make a cinder of his heart!—asked her at the hands of the Pharaoh for his harem—"

Mentu interrupted him with a growling imprecation and Hotep's fair face darkened.

"Yesterday morning he sent three men to me," the taskmaster continued, "with the document of gift from the Son of Ptah, but she saw them in time and fled into the desert. At that hour there were only women in the camp, and the three men made short work of me when I would have held them till she escaped. In three hours, two of them returned—one, sick from hard usage, and the third, they said, had been pitched over the cliff-front into the valley of the Nile. They had not captured her and they were too much enraged to explain why they had not. During their absence I emptied the quarries of Israelites and posted them along the Nile to halt the Egyptians, if they came to the river with Rachel. But we let them return to Memphis empty-handed, and thereafter searched the hills till sunset. The maiden's foster-mother, it seems, fled with her, but neither of them, nor any trace of them, was to be found."

"Does it not appear to thee," Hotep asked, after a little silence, "that the same hand which so forcibly persuaded the Egyptians to abandon the pursuit may have led the maiden to a place of safety? My surmises have been right in general, O noble Mentu, but not in detail," he continued, turning to the murket. "There

is, however, the element of danger now to take the place of the gracelessness we would have laid to him. Thou knowest Har-hat, my Lord."

He thanked the dark-faced taskmaster. "Have no concern for the maiden. She is safe, I doubt not."

He took Mentu's arm and passing up through the Israelitish camp, climbed the slope behind it.

"It is my duty and thine to hide this lovely folly up here, ere these searching minions of Har-hat or frantic Israelites come upon it."

The scribe's sense of direction and location was keen. It was one of the goodly endowments of the savage and the beast which the gods had added to the powers of this man of splendid intellect. He doubled back through the great rocks, his steps a little rapid and never hesitating, as though his destination were in full view. Mentu followed him, silent and moodily thoughtful. At last Hotep stopped.

Before them was a narrow aisle leading down from the summit of the hill. It was hemmed in on each side by tumbled masses of stone. The aisle terminated at its lower end in a long white drift of sand against a great cube. Instinct and reason told Hotep that here had been the hiding-place of Athor, but there was no sign that human foot had ever entered the spot. After a space of puzzlement, Hotep smiled.

"He hath made way with the sacrilege himself," he said with relief in his voice; "I had not credited him with so much foresight. Nay, now, if the runaway will but come home, we will forgive him."

Mentu said nothing. Indeed, since Hotep had told him of the recent doings of Kenkenes, the murket had had little to say. He had felt in his lifetime most of

the sorrows that can overtake a man of his position and attainments—but he had never known the chagrin of a wayward child. The fear that he was to know that humiliation, now, made his heart heavy beyond words.

As they turned away the sound of voices smote upon their ears.

"Near this spot, it must be, my Lord," one said.

"Find the sacrilege, lout. We seek not the neighborhood of it."

Hotep caught the murket's arm and drew him out of the aisle into hiding behind another great stone.

"This is the place; this is the place," the first voice declared, and his statement was seconded by another and as positive a voice.

There was the sound of the new-comers emerging into the aisle, and immediately the first speaker exclaimed in a tone full of astonishment and disappointment:

"O, aye; I see!" the master assented with an irritating laugh.

"Har-hat!" Hotep whispered.

Another of the party broke in impatiently: "Make an end to this chase. Saw you any sacrilege, or was it a phantom of your stupid dreams?"

"Asar-Mut," Mentu said under his breath.

The first voice and its second protested in chorus.

"As the gods hear me, I saw it!" the first went on. "It was a statue most sacrilegiously wrought and the man stood before it. It was cunningly hidden between two walls, and there is no spot on the desert that looks so much like the place as this. And yet, no wall—no statue—no sign of—"

"How did you find it yesterday?" the fan-bearer asked.

"We followed the hag, and she, the girl. The pair of them were in sight of each other, as they ran."

"How did they find it?"

"Magic! Magic!"

"There were three of you and one man overthrew you all?" the high priest commented suspiciously.

"Holy Father!" the servant protested wildly, "he was a giant—a monster for bigness. Besides, there were but two of us, after he had all but throttled me."

Har-hat laughed again. "Aye, and after he pitched Nak over the cliff, there was but one. But tell me this: was he noble or a churl?"

"He wore the circlet."

Mentu's long fingers bent as if he longed for a throat between them.

"The craven invented his giant to salve his valor," the priest said.

"It may be," the fan-bearer replied musingly, "but thy nephew, holy Father, is conspicuously tall and well-muscled. Likewise, he is a sculptor. Furthermore, the two slaves came home badly abused. Unas has some proof for his tale—"

"Kenkenes is the soul of fidelity," the high priest retorted warmly. "He has had unnumbered opportunities to betray the gods and he has ever been steadfast."

"Nay, I did not impugn him. The similarity merely appealed to me. Let us get down into the valley and question that villain Atsu. I would know what became of the girl."

"Mine interests are solely with the ecclesiastical fea-

tures of the offense, my Lord," Asar-Mut replied. "I would get back to Memphis."

"Bear us company a little longer, holy Father. The taskmaster may tell us somewhat of this blaspheming sculptor-giant."

When the last sound of the departing men died away, Mentu turned across the hill toward the Nile-front of the cliff.

"Nay, I will go back to Memphis first," he said grimly. "Mayhap Kenkenes hath returned. If Asar-Mut should question him, he would not evade nor equivocate, so I shall send him away that he may not meet his uncle. I would not have him lie, but he shall not accomplish his own undoing."

But days of seeking followed, growing frantic as time went on, and there was no trace of the lost artist. Even his pet ape did not return. Asar-Mut questioned Mentu closely concerning the fidelity of Kenkenes to the faith and the ritual.

"I ask after his soul," he explained. But he gained no evidence from Mentu.

On the fourteenth day after the disappearance of the young sculptor, Sepet, the boatman that had hired his bari to Kenkenes, found the boat among the wharf piling. It was overturned, its bottom ripped out, one side crushed as if a river-horse had played with it. In the small compartment at the tiller were provisions for a light lunch; a wallet, empty; a rope and a plummet of bronze used to moor a boat in midstream while the sportsman fished; the light woolen mantle worn as often for protection against the sun as against the cold, and other things to prove that Kenkenes had met with disaster.

The fate of the young man seemed to be explained. The great house of Mentu was darkened; the servants went unkempt and the artist wore a blue scarf knotted about his hips. The high priest dismissed the subject of the sacrilege from his mind, now that his nephew was dead. The people of Memphis who knew Kenkenes mourned with Mentu; the festivities were dull without him, and there were some, like Io and the Lady Senci, who went into retirement and were not to be comforted.

But Har-hat presented jeweled housings to Apis for the prospering of his search after Rachel, and set about assisting the god with all his might. He sent couriers, armed with a description and warrant for the arrest of Kenkenes and the Israelite, into all the large cities of Egypt. He ransacked Pa-Ramesu and the brick-fields, Silsilis, Syene, where there were quarries, and especially Thebes, which was large and remote, a tempting place for fugitives.

When he heard the news of the young sculptor's death, he actually sent a message of condolence to Mentu, much to the tearful and unspeakable rage of the heart-broken murket. Yet, with all the limitless resources placed at the command of a bearer of the king's fan, Har-hat continued to search for the young artist, until word came to him from Thebes several days later.

His next move was to bring to the notice of the Pharaoh that the taskmaster Atsu was pampering the Israelites of Masaarah and defeating the ends of the government. Furthermore, the overseer had treated with contempt the personal commands of the fan-bearer. So Atsu was removed entirely from over the

Hebrews, reduced to the rank of a common soldier, and returned to the nome from which he came, in the coif and tunic of a cavalryman.

Thus it was that Har-hat avenged himself for the loss of Rachel, put all aid out of her reach, and kept up an unceasing pursuit of her.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE TOMB OF THE PHARAOH

It was far into the tenth night that Kenkenes arrived in Thebes. On the sixteenth day Rachel would begin to expect him, and he could not hope to reach Memphis by that time. She should not wait an hour longer than necessary. He would get the signet that night and return by the swiftest boat obtainable in Thebes. The dawn should find him on the way to Memphis.

He entered the streets of the Libyan suburb of the holy city, and passed through it to the scattering houses, set outside the thickly-settled portion, and nearer to the necropolis. At the portals of the most pretentious of these houses he knocked and was admitted.

He was met presently in the chamber of guests by an old man, gray-haired and bent. This was the keeper of the tomb of Rameses the Great.

"I am the son of Mentu," he said, "thy friend, and the friend of the Incomparable Pharaoh. Perchance thou dost remember me."

"I remember Mentu," the old man replied, after a space that might have been spent in rumination, or in collecting his faculties to speak.

"He decorated the tomb of Rameses," the young man continued.

"Aye, I remember. I watched him often at the work."

"Thou knowest how the great king loved him."

The old man bent his head in assent.

"He was given a signet by Rameses, and on the jewel was testimony of royal favor which should outlive the Pharaoh and Mentu himself."

"Even so. A precious talisman, and a rare one."

"It was lost."

"Nay! Lost! Alas, that is losing the favor of Osiris. What a calamity!" The old man shook his head and his gray brows knitted.

"But the place in which it was lost is small, and I would search for it again."

"That is wise. The gods aid them who surrender not."

By this time the old man's face had become inquiring.

"There is need for the signet now—"

"The noble Mentu, in trouble?" the old man queried.

"The son of the noble Mentu is in trouble—the purity of an innocent one at stake, and the foiling of a villain to accomplish," Kenkenes answered earnestly.

"A sore need. Is it— Wouldst thou have me aid thee?"

"Thou hast said. I come to thee to crave thy permission to search again for the signet."

"Nay, but I give it freely. Yet I do not understand."

"The signet was lost in the tomb of the Incomparable Pharaoh. May I not visit the crypt?"

The old man thought a moment. "Aye, thou canst search. If thou wilt come for me to-morrow—"

"Nay, I would go this very night."

The keeper's face sobered and he shook his head.

"Deny me not, I pray thee," Kenkenes entreated earnestly. "Thou, who hast lived so many years, hast at some time weighed the value of a single moment. In the waste or use of the scant space between two breaths have lives been lost, souls smirched, the unlimited history of the future turned. And never was a greater stake upon the saving of time than in this strait—which is the peril of spotless womanhood."

The old man rubbed his head. "Aye, I know, I know. Thy haste is justifiable, but—"

"I can go alone. There is no need that thou shouldst waste an hour of thy needed sleep for me. I pledge thee I shall conduct myself without thee as I should beneath thine eye. Most reverently will I enter, most reverently search, most reverently depart, and none need ever know I went alone."

The ancient keeper weakened at the earnestness of the young man.

"And thou wilt permit no eye to see thee enter or come forth from the valley?"

"Most cautious will I be—most secret and discreet."

"Canst thou open the gates?"

"I have not forgotten from the daily practice that was mine for many weeks."

"Then go, and let no man know of this. Amen give thee success."

Kenkenes thanked him gratefully and went at once.

The moon was in its third quarter, but it was near

midnight and the valley of the Nile between the distant highlands to the east and west was in soft light.

On the eastern side of the river there was only a feeble glimmer from a window where some chanting leech stood by a bedside, or where a feast was still on. But under the luster of the waning moon Thebes lost its outlines and became a city of marbles and shadows and undefined limits.

On the western side the vision was interrupted by a lofty, sharp-toothed range, tipped with a few scattered stars of the first magnitude. In the plain at its base were the palaces of Amenophis III, of Rameses II, and their temples, the temples of the Tothmes, and far to the south the majestic colossi of Amenophis III towered up through the silver light, the faces, in their own shadow, turned in eternal contemplation of the sunrise. Grouped about the great edifices were the booths of funeral stuffs and the stalls of caterers to the populace of the Libyan suburb of Thebes. But these were hidden in the dark shadows which the great structures threw. The moon blotted out the profane things of the holy city and discovered only its splendors to the sky.

At the northwest limits of the suburb, the hills approached the Nile, leaving only a narrow strip a few hundred yards wide between their fronts and the water. Here the steep ramparts were divided by a tortuous cleft, which wound back with many cross-fissures deep into the desert. The ravine was simply a chasm, with perpendicular sides of naked rock.

At its upper end, it was blocked by a wall of unscalable heights. Nowhere in its length was it wider than a hundred yards, and across the mouth a gate-

way wide enough for three chariots abreast had been built of red granite.

This was the valley of the Tombs of the Kings.

In chambers hewn in solid rock, the monarchs of the eighteenth and nineteenth dynasties were entombed. All along the walls of the gorge, nature had secured the sacred resting-place of the sovereigns against trespass from the end and sides of the chasm, and Egypt had dutifully strengthened the one weak point in the fortification—the entrance—by the gateway of granite. But there was no vigilance of guards. Whosoever knew how to open the gates might enter the valley. The secret of the bolts was known only among the members of the royal family and the court. To Kenkenes, whose craft as a sculptor had taught him the intricate devices used in closing tombs, the opening of these gates was simple. Even the mighty portals of Khufu and Menka-ra would yield responsive to his intelligent touch.

He let himself into the valley and, closing the valves behind him, went up the tortuous gorge, darkened by the shadows of its walls. He continued past the mouth of the valley's southern arm wherein were entombed the kings of the eighteenth dynasty. Here, in this open space, he could see the circling bats, which before he could only hear above his head. Somewhere among the rocks up the moonlit hollow an owl hooted. But the tombs he sought were in the upper end of the main ravine.

Here lay Rameses I, the founder of that illustrious dynasty—the nineteenth. Near-by was his son, Seti I, and next to him the splendid tyrant, Rameses the Great, the Incomparable Pharaoh.

By the time Kenkenes had reached the spot, all lightness in his heart had gone out like the extinguishing of a candle, and the weight of suspense, the fear of failure, fell on him as suddenly. He approached the elaborate façade of the solemn portals, climbed the pairs of steps, and paused at each of the many landings with a prayer for the success of his mission, not for the repose of the royal soul, after the custom of other visitors. With trembling hands he pushed the doors, rough with inscriptions, and the great stone valves swung ponderously inward, the bronze pins making no sound as they turned in the sockets. Kenkenes entered and closed the portals behind him.

Instantly all sound of the outside world was cut off —the sound of the wind, the chafing of the sands on the hills above, the movement and cries of night-birds, beasts and insects. Absolute stillness and original night surrounded him.

With all speed he lighted his lamp, but the flaring flame illuminated only a little space in the brooding, hovering blackness about him.

The atmosphere was stagnant and heavily burdened with old aromatic scent, and the silence seemed to have accumulated in the years. Even the soft whetting of his sandal, as he walked, made echoes that shouted at him. The little blaze fizzed and sputtered noisily and each throb of his heart sounded like a knock on the portal.

He did not pause. The darkness might cloud and tinge and swallow up his light as turbid water absorbs the clear; the silence might resent the violation. This was the habitation of a royal soul in perpetual vigil over its corpse and vested with all the powers

and austere propensities of a thing supernatural. But not once did the impulse come to him to fly. Rachel's face attended him like a lamp.

He moved forward, his path only discovered to him step by step as the light advanced, the sumptuous frescoes done by the hand of his father emerging, one detail at a time. The solemn figures fixed accusing eyes upon him from every frieze; the passive countenance of the monarch himself confronted him from every wall. One wondrous chamber after another he traversed, for the tomb penetrated the very core of the mountain.

The innermost crypt contained the altars. This was the sanctuary, the holy of holies, never entered except by a hierarch.

When Kenkenes reached the final threshold he paused. Thus far, his presence had been merely a midnight intrusion. If he entered the sanctuary his coming would be violation. He thought of the distress of Rachel and dared.

The first alabaster altar glistened suddenly out of the night like a bank of snow. Kenkenes' sandal grated on the sandy dust that lay thick on the floor. Not even the keeper had entered this crypt to remove the accumulated dust of six years.

Under this floor of solid granite was the pit containing the sarcophagi of the dead monarch, of his favorite son and destined heir, Shaemus, and his well-beloved queen, Neferari Thermuthis. The opening into the pit had been sealed when Rameses had descended to emerge no more. The chamber over it was brilliant with frescoing and covered with inscriptions. There were three magnificent altars of alabas-

ter and over each was an oval containing the name of one of the three sleepers in the pit below.

In this chapel the signet had been lost.

Kenkenes set his light on the floor and began his search. The first time he searched the floor, he laid the lack of success to his excited work. The second time, the perspiration began to trickle down his temples. Thereafter he sought, lengthwise and crosswise, calling on the gods for aid, but there was no glint of the jewel.

At last, sick with despair, he sat down to collect himself. Suddenly across the heavy silence there smote a sound. In a place closer to the beating heart of the world, the movement might have escaped him. Now, though it was but the rustle of sweeping robes, it seemed to sough like the wind among the clashing blades of palm-leaves.

For a moment Kenkenes sat, transfixed, and in that moment the sound came nearer. He remembered the injunction of the old keeper. Human or supernatural, the new-comer must not find him there. He leaped behind the altar of Shaemus, extinguishing the light as he did so. He flung the corner of his kamis over the reeking wick that the odor might not escape, but his fear in that direction was materially lessened when he saw that the stranger bore a fuming torch.

On one end of the short pole of the torch was a knot of flaming pitch, on the other was a bronze ring fitted with sprawling claws. The stranger set the light on the floor and the device kept the torch upright. He crossed the room and stood at the altar of Neferari Thermuthis.

By the deeply fringed and voluminous draperies, and by the venerable beard, rippling and streaked with gray, the young sculptor took the stranger to be an Israelite. As Kenkenes looked upon him, he was minded of his father, the magnificent Mentu. There was the bearing of the courtier, with the same wondrous stature, the same massive frame. But the delicate features of the Egyptian, the long, slim fingers, the narrow foot, were absent. In this man's countenance there was majesty instead of grace; in his figure, might, instead of elegance. The expression had need of only a little emphasis in either direction to become benign or terrible. Kenkenes caught a single glance of the eyes under the gray shelter of the heavy brows. Once, the young man had seen hanging from Meneptah's neck the rarest jewel in the royal treasure. The wise men had called it an opal. It shot lights as beautiful and awful as the intensest flame. And something in the eyes of this mighty man brought back to Kenkenes the memory of the fires of that wondrous gem.

The stranger stood in profound meditation, his splendid head gradually sinking until it rested on his breast. The arms hung by the sides. The attitude suggested a sorrow healed by the long years until it was no more a pain, but a memory so subduing that it depressed. At last the great man sank to his knees, with a movement quite in keeping with his grandeur and his mood, and bowed his head on his arms.

Pressed down with awe, Kenkenes followed his example, and although he seemed to kneel on some

rough chisel mark in the floor, he did not shift his position. The discomfort seemed appropriate as penitence on that holy occasion.

After a long time the stranger arose, took up the torch and quitted the chamber. He went away more slowly than he had come, with reluctant step and averted face.

When night and profound silence were restored in the crypt, Kenkenes regained his feet and, examining the irritated knee, found the offending object clinging to the impression it had made in the flesh. The shape of the trifle sent a wild hope through his brain. Groping through the dark, he found his lamp and lighted it with trembling hands.

He held the lapis-lazuli signet!

He did not move. He only grasped the scarab tightly and panted. The sudden change from intense suspense to intense relief had deprived him of the power of expression. Only his physical make-up manifested its rebellion against the shock.

As the tumult in his heart subsided, his mind began to confront him with happy fancies. Rachel was already free. In that moment of exuberance he thrust aside, as monstrous, the bar of different faith. He believed he could overcome it by the very compelling power of his love and the righteousness of his cause. He spent no time picturing the method of his triumph over it. Beyond that obstacle were tender pictures of home-making, love and life, which so filled him with emotion that, in a sudden ebullition of boyish gratitude, he pressed the all-potent signet to his lips.

Then, his cheeks reddening with a little shame at his impulsiveness, he examined the scarab. The cord

by which it had been suspended passed through a small gold ring between the claws of the beetle. This had worn very thin and some slight wrench had broken it.

"Ah!" he exclaimed aloud. "It is even as I had thought. But let me not seem to boast when I tell my father of it. It will be victory enough for me to display the jewel, and abashment enough for him to know he was wrong."

He ceased to speak, but the echoes talked on after him. He shivered, caught up his light and raced through the sumptuous tomb into the world again.

It was near dawn and the skies were pallid. He was hungry and weary but most impatient to be gone. He would repair to Thebes and break his fast. Thereafter he would procure the swiftest boat on the Nile and take his rest while speeding toward Memphis.

The inn of the necropolis was like an immense dwelling, except that the courts were stable-yards. The doors, opening off the porch, were always open and a light burned by night within the chamber. So long and so murkily had it burnt, that the chamber Kenkenes entered was smoky and redolent of it. Aside from a high, bench-like table, running half the length of the rear wall, there was nothing else in the room. Kenkenes rapped on the table. In a little time an Egyptian emerged from under the counter, on the other side. Understanding at last that the guest wished to be fed, he staggered sleepily through a door and, presently reappearing, signed Kenkenes to enter.

The room into which the young sculptor was conducted was too large to be lighted by the two lamps, hung from hooks, one at each end of the chamber. Down either side, hidden in the shadows, were long

benches, and from the huddled heap that occupied the full length of each, it was to be surmised that men were sleeping on them. Above them the slatted blinds had been withdrawn from the small windows and the morning breeze was blowing strongly through the chamber. At the upper end was another table, similar to the one in the outer room, except for a napkin in the middle with a bottle of water set upon it. An Egyptian woman stood beside this table and gave the young man a wooden stool.

As Kenkenes walked toward the seat a stronger blast of wind puffed out the light above his head. The woman climbed up to take the lamp down and set it on the table while she relighted it. The skirt of her dress caught on the top of the stool she had mounted and pulled it over on the wooden floor with a sharp sound.

One of the sleepers stirred at the noise and turned over. Presently he sat up.

Kenkenes righted the stool and sat down on it, the light shining in his face. He saw the guest in the shadow shake off the light covering and walk swiftly through the door into the outer chamber.

Meanwhile the silent woman served her guest with cold baked water-fowl, endives, cucumbers, wheat bread and grapes, and a weak white wine. Kenkenes ate deliberately, and consumed all that was set before him. When he had made an end, he paid his reckoning to the woman and returned into the outer chamber.

At the doors, he was confronted by four members of the city constabulary and a Nubian in a striped tunic.

"Seize him!" the Nubian cried. Instantly the four

men flung themselves upon Kenkenes and pinioned his arms.

"Nay, by the gods," he exclaimed angrily. "What mean you?"

"Parley not with him," the Nubian said in excitement. "Get him in bonds stronger than the grip of hands. He is muscled like a bull."

The young sculptor looked at the Nubian. He had seen him before—had had unpleasant dealings with him. And then he remembered, so suddenly and so fiercely that his captors felt the sinews creep in his arms.

"Set spare thee and thine infamous master to me!" he exclaimed violently.

The Nubian retreated a little, for Kenkenes had strained toward him.

"Get him into the four walls of a cell," the Nubian urged the guards. "I may not lose him again, as I value my head."

The guards started out of the doors and Kenkenes went with them, unresisting, but not passively. All the thoughts were his that can come to a man, on whose freedom depend another's life and happiness. Added to these was an all-consuming hate of her enemy and his, new-fed by this latest offense from Harhat. With difficulty he kept the tumult of his emotions from manifesting themselves to his captors. They feared that his calm was ominous, and held him tightly.

The necropolis was not astir and the streets were wind-haunted. The tread of the six men set dogs to barking, and only now and then was a face shown at the doorways. For this Kenkenes thanked his gods,

for he was proud, and the eye of the humblest slave upon him in his humiliating plight would have hurt him more keenly than blows.

The prison was a square building of rough stone, flat-roofed, three stories in height. The red walls were broken at regular intervals by crevices, barred with bronze. There was but one entrance.

Herein were confined all the malefactors of the great city of the gods, and since the population of Thebes might have comprised something over half a million inhabitants, the dwellers of that grim and impregnable prison were not few in number.

Kenkenes was led through the doors, down a low-roofed, narrow, stone-walled corridor to the room of the governor of police.

This was a hall, with a lofty ceiling, highly colored and supported by loteform pillars of brilliant stone. Toth, the ibis-headed, and the Goddess Ma, crowned with plumes, her wings forward drooping, were painted on the walls. A long table, massive, plain and solid like a sarcophagus, stood in the center of the room. A confused litter of curled sheets of papyrus, and long strips of unrolled linen scrolls were distributed carelessly over the polished surface. At one side were eight plates of stone—the tables of law, codified and blessed by Toth.

The governor of police was absent, but his vice, who was jailer and scribe in one, sat in a chair behind the great table.

When the party entered, he sat up, undid a new scroll, wetted the reed pen in the pigment, and was ready.

"Name?" he began, preparing to write.

"That, thou knowest," Kenkenes retorted. The Nubian bowed respectfully and approaching, whispered to the scribe. The official ran over some of the scrolls and having found the one he sought, proceeded to make his entries from the information contained therein.

When the man had finished Kenkenes nodded toward the eight volumes of the law.

"If thou art as acquainted with the laws of Egypt as thine office requires, thou knowest that no free-born Egyptian may be kept ignorant of the charge that accomplished his arrest. Wherefore am I taken?"

"For sacrilege and slave-stealing," the scribe replied calmly.

"At the complaint of Har-hat, bearer of the king's fan," Kenkenes added.

"Until such time as stronger proof of thy misdeeds may be brought against thee," the scribe continued.

"Even so. In plainer words, I shall be held till I confess what he would have me tell, or until I decay in this tomb. Let me give thee my word, I shall do neither. Unhand me. I shall not attempt to escape."

At a sign from the scribe the four men released him and took up a position at the doors. Kenkenes opened his wallet and displayed the signet. The scribe took it and read the inscription. There was no doubting the young man's right to the jewel for here was the name of Mentu, even as the chief adviser had given it in identifying the prisoner. The official frowned and stroked his chin.

"This petitions the Pharaoh," he said at last. "I can not pass upon it."

"Send me to my cell, then, and do thou follow," Kenkenes said. "I have somewhat to tell thee."

"Take him to his cell," the official said to the men as he returned the signet to the prisoner. "I shall attend him."

Kenkenes was led into a corridor, wide enough for three walking side by side. There was no light therein, but the foremost of the four stooped before what seemed a section of solid wall and after a little fumbling, a massive door swung inward.

The chamber into which it led was wide enough for a pallet of straw laid lengthwise, with passage room between it and the opposite wall. The foot of the bed was within two feet of the door. Between the stones, in the opposite end near the ceiling, was a crevice, little wider than two palms. This noted, the interior of the cell has been described.

The jailer entered after him, and let the door fall shut.

"I have but to crave a messenger of thee—a swift and a sure one—one who can hold his peace and hath pride in his calling. I can offer all he demands. And this, further. Keep his going a secret, for I am beset and I would not have my rescue by the Pharaoh thwarted."

"I can send thee a messenger," the jailer answered.

"Ere midday," Kenkenes added.

"I hear," the passive official assented.

The solid section of wall swung shut behind him and the great bolts shot into place.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE PETITION

Some time later the bar rattled down again, and the jailer stood without, a scribe at his side. At a sign from the jailer, the latter made as though to enter, but Kenkenes stopped him.

"I have need of your materials only," he said, "but the fee shall be yours nevertheless." The man set his case on the floor and Kenkenes put a ring of silver in the outstretched palm.

"Fail me not in a faithful messenger," the prisoner repeated to the jailer. The official nodded, and the door was closed again.

Kenkenes sat on the floor beside the case, laid the cover back and taking out materials, wrote thus:

"To my friend, the noble Hotep, greeting:

"This from Kenkenes, whom ill-fortune can not wholly possess, while he may call thee his friend.

"I speak to thee out of the prison at Tape, where I am held for stealing a bondmaiden and for executing a statue against the canons of the sculptor's ritual. The accumulated penalty for these offenses is great—my plight is most serious.

"The pitying gods have left me one chance for escape. If I fail I shall molder here, for my counsel

is mine and the demons of Amenti shall not rend it from me.

"The tale is short and miserable. But for the necessity I would not repeat it, for it publishes the humiliation of sweet innocence.

"Suffice it to say that the offended is she of whom we talked one day on the hill back of Masaarah; the offender is Har-hat who hath buried me here in Tape.

"One morning he saw her at the quarries and, taken with her beauty, asked her at the hands of the Pharaoh, for the hatefullest bondage pure maidenhood ever knew.

"She fled from the minions he sent to take her, and came to me in that spot on the hillside where thou and I did talk.

"There the minions found us, and by the evidence they looked upon, I am further charged with sacrilege.

"Thou dost remember the all-powerful signet, which my father had from the Incomparable Pharaoh. He lost it in the tomb of the king, three years ago, abandoning the search for it before I was assured that it was not to be found.

"So strong was my faith that the signet was in the tomb, that when this disaster overtook her, I came to Tape at once to look again for the treasure. I found it.

"But by some unknowable mischance mine enemy discovered my whereabouts and a third minion, who escaped my wrath before the statue that morning, appeared in the city and caused me to be delivered up to the authorities on the charges already named.

"She is hidden, and I have provided for her protection, as well as I may, against the wishes of the strongest man in the land. For her immediate welfare I am

not greatly troubled. But, alas! I would be with her —thou knowest, O my Hotep, the hunger and heart-ache of such separation.

"If the Pharaoh honor not the signet herein inclosed, tell my father of my plight, let me know the decision of the king, and then I shall trust to the Hathors for liberty.

"Of this contingency, I would not speak at length. It may be tempting the caprice of the Seven Sisters to presuppose such misfortune.

"Let not my father intervene for me. He shall not endanger himself further than I have already asked of him.

"But remember thou this injunction most surely. That it shall be last and therefore freshest in thy memory, I put this at the end of the letter.

"Put the petition herein inclosed into the Pharaoh's hands! For my life's sake let it not come into the possession of any other.

"I shall write no more. My scant eloquence must be saved for the king.

"Gods! but it is good to have faith in a friend. I salute thee. KENKENES."

The letter to Hotep complete, Kenkenes took up another roll and wrote thus to Meneptah:

"To Meneptah, Beloved of Ptah, Ambassador of Amen, Vicar of Ra, Lord over Upper and Lower Egypt, greeting:"

At this point he paused. His power of expression, aghast at the magnitude of the stake laid on its suc-

cessful use, became panic-stricken and fled from him. He feared that words could not be chosen which would justify his sacrilege or prove his claims to Rachel greater than Har-hat's. Meneptah would be hedged about with prejudice against his first cause, and deterred by the prior right of Har-hat, in the second. The last man that talked with the king molded him. Flattery alone might prevail against coercion. It was the one hope.

Kenkenes seized his pen and wrote:

"This from thy subject, Kenkenes, the son of Mentu, thy murket.

"I give thee a true story, O Defender of Women.

"There is a maiden whose kinsmen died of hard labor in the service of Egypt. Not one was left to care for her. Of all her house, she alone remains. They died in ignominy. Shall the last remnant of the unhappy family be stamped out in dishonor?

"If one came before thee seeking to insult innocence, and another begging leave to protect it, thou wouldst choose for him who would keep pure the undefiled. Have I not said, O my King?

"Before thee, even now is such a choice.

"Already thou hast given over the mastership of Rachel, daughter of Maai the Israelite, to thy fan-bearer, Har-hat. By the lips of his own servants, I am informed that he would have put her in his harem.

"She fled from him and I hid her away, for I could not bear to deliver her up to the despoiler.

"I love her—she loveth me. Wilt thou not give her to me to wife?

"Thine illustrious sire bespeaketh thy favor, out of Amenti. Behold his signet and its injunction.

"Furthermore, I confess to sacrilege against Athor, in carving a statue which ignored the sculptor's ritual. For this, and for hiding the Israelite, am I imprisoned in the city stronghold of Tape.

"I would be free to return to my love and comfort her, but if it shall overtax thy generosity to release me, I pray thee announce my sentence and let me begin to count the hours till I shall come forth again.

"The Israelite hath a nurse, a feeble and sick old woman, Deborah by name, whom the minions of Harhat abused. She can be of no further use in servitude, and I would have thee set her free to bear company to her love, the white-souled Rachel.

"But if these last prayers imperil the first by strain upon thy indulgence, O Beloved of Ptah, do thou set them aside, and grant only the safety of the oppressed maiden.

"These to thy hand, by the hand of the scribe, Hotep.

"KENKENES."

The letter complete, he summoned the messenger.

"How swift art thou?" he asked.

"So swift that my service is desired beyond mine opportunities to accept," was the answer.

"How is it that thou art ready to serve me? Thou seest my plight."

"The jailer spoke of thee as petitioning the Pharaoh. The king is in the north where I have not been in all the reign of Meneptah. Thou offerest me a pleasure and the fee shall be in proportion to the length of the journey."

"Nay, but thou art a genius. Thou dost move me to imitate the Hathors, since they add fortune to the already fortunate. Mark me. I will give thee thy fee now. If thou dost return me a letter showing that thou hast carried the message with all faith and speed, I shall give thee another fee on thy home-coming. What thinkest thou?"

The man smiled and nodded. "Naught but the darts of Amenti shall delay me."

Kenkenes gave him the message, and a handful of rings. The man expressed his thanks, after which he went forth, and the door was barred.

Kenkenes stood for a while, motionless before the tightly fitted portal of stone. Then through the high crevice that was his window the sounds of life outside smote upon his ear. The noise of the city seemed to become all revel. Some one under the walls laughed —the hearty, raucous laugh of the care-free boor.

He turned about and flung himself face down in the straw of his pallet.

He had begun to wait.

CHAPTER XXV

THE LOVE OF RAMESES

By the twentieth of May, the court of Meneptah was ready to proceed to Tanis.

The next week the Pharaoh would depart. To-night he received noble Memphis for a final revel.

His palace was aglow, from its tremendous portals to the airy hypostyle upon its roof and from far-reaching wing to wing, with countless colored lights. From every architrave and cornice depended garlands and draperies, and tinted banners waved unseen in the dark. The great loteform pillars supporting the porch were festooned with lotus flowers, and the approaches were strewn with palm-leaves.

The guests came in chariots with but a single attendant or in litters accompanied by a gorgeous retinue and much authority. Charioteers swore full-mouthed oaths and smote slaves; horses reared and plunged and bearers hurried back through the dark with empty chairs. Meanwhile the pacing sentries made frank criticism and gazed at each alighting new-comer with eyes of connoisseurs.

When the portals opened, a broad shaft of light shot into the night, a multitude of attendants was seen bowing; gusts of reedy music and babble and the smell

of wilting flowers and Puntish incense swept into the outer air.

Within, the great feast began and proceeded to completeness. The tables were removed and the stage of the revel was far advanced. The levels of scented vapor from the aromatic torches undulated midway between the ceiling and the floor and belted the frescoes upon the paneled walls. Far up the vaulted hall, the Pharaoh and his queen, in royal isolation, were growing weary.

The lions chained to their lofty dais slept. The guardian nobles that stood about the royal pair leaned heavily upon their arms.

Out in the sanded strip across the tessellated floor, tumblers were glistening with perspiration from their vaguely noticed efforts. Apart from the guests the painted musicians squatted close together and made the air vibrant with the softly monotonous strumming of their instruments.

The company, which was large, had fallen into easy attitudes; an exciting game of drafts, or a story-teller, or a beauty, attracting groups here and there over the hall.

Before one table, whereon the scattered pawns of a game yet lay, Rameses lounged in a deep chair, a semi-recumbent figure in marble and obsidian. Beside him, where she had seated herself at his command, was Masanath.

There was Seti at Ta-user's side, but Io was not at the feast. She mourned for Kenkenes. Ta-meri was there, the bride of a week to Nechutes, who hovered about her without eye or ear for any other of the company. Siptah, Menes, Har-hat, all of the group

save Hotep and Kenkenes, were present and near enough to be of the crown prince's party, yet scattered sufficiently to talk among themselves.

The game of drafts, prolonged from one to many, had ended disastrously for the prince in spite of his most gallant efforts to win. Masanath, against whom he had played, finally thrust the pawns away and refused to play further with him.

"Thou dost make sport for the Hathors, O Prince," she said. "Have respect for thyself and indulge their caprice no more."

"Hast thou not heard that we may compel the gods?" he asked. "Perhaps I do but indulge them, of a truth. But let me set mine own will against fate and there shall be no more losing for me."

"It is a precarious game. Perchance there is as strong a will as thine, compelling the Hathors contrarily to thine own desires. What, then, O Rameses?"

"By the gambling god, Toth, I shall try it!" he exclaimed. "The opportunity is before me even now."

He took her hand.

"I catch thy meaning, Beloved of Isis! Thou didst challenge me long ago, and long ago I took it up. Thus far have we fenced behind shields. Down with the bull-hide, now, and bare the heart!"

"Thou dost forget thyself," she retorted, wrenching her hand from him. "The eyes of thy guests are upon thee."

He laughed. "The prince's doings become the fashion. Let me be seen and there shall be no woman's hand unpossessed in this chamber."

"Thou shalt set no fashion by me. Neither shalt thou rend the Hathors between thy wishes and mine.

Furthermore, if thou dost forget thy princely dignity, thy power will not prevent me if I would remind thee of thy lapse."

"War!" he exclaimed. "Now, by the battling hosts of Set, never have I met a foe so worthy the overcoming. Listen! Dost thou know that I have sorrows? Dost thou remember that I may have sleepless nights and unhappy days—discontents, heartaches and oppressions? I am not less human because I am royal, but because I am royal I am more unhappy. Sorry indeed is a prince's lot! Wherefore? Because he is sated with submission; because he hath drunk satiety to its very dregs; because he hath been denied the healing hunger of appetite, ambition, conquest. How hath my miserable heart longed to aspire—to conquer! I have starved for something beyond my reach. But lo! in thee I have found what I sought. Thou hast defied me, rebuffed me, thwarted me till the surfeited soul in me hath grown fat upon resistance. Now shall the longing to conquer that racketh me be fed! Go on in thy rebellion, Masanath! Gods! but thou art a foe worthy the subduing! I would not have thee give up to me now. I would earn thee by defeats, losses and many scars. And thy kiss of submission, in some far day, will give me more joy than the instant capitulation of many empires."

"Thou hast provided thyself with lifelong warfare, and triumph to thine enemy at the end," she answered serenely.

Her reply seemed to awaken a train of thought in the prince. He did not respond immediately. He leaned his elbows on his knees, and clasping his hands

before him, thought a while. In the silence the talk of the others was audible.

"The festivities of Memphis have lost two, since they lost one," Menes mused.

"Give us thy meaning," Nechutes asked.

"Hast seen Hotep in Memphian revels since Kenkenes died?" the captain asked, by way of answer.

Nechutes shook his head. "The gods have dealt heavily with Mentu," he said after a little silence. "Not even the body of his son returned to him for burial!"

Har-hat, who had been perched on the arm of Ta-meri's chair, broke in.

"Mayhap the young man is not dead," he surmised.

"All the Memphian nome hath been searched, my Lord," Menes protested.

"Aye, but these flighty geniuses are not to be measured by doings of other men. Perhaps he hath gone to teach the singing girls at Abydos or Tape."

"Ah, my Lord!" protested Ta-meri, horrified.

"Nay, now," Har-hat responded, bending over her. "I but give his friends hope. To prove my sincerity I will wager my biggest diamond against thy three brightest smiles that thou wilt hear of Kenkenes again, alive and dreamy as ever, led into this strange absence by some moonshine caprice."

"I would give more than my biggest diamond to believe thee," Nechutes muttered, turning away.

"Wilt thou wager?" the fan-bearer demanded with animation.

"Nay!" was the cup-bearer's blunt reply. Har-hat shrugged his shoulders and lapsed into silence. Rame-

ses leaned toward Masanath again. The expression on his face during the talk and the tone he chose now showed that he had not heard, nor was even conscious of the silence that had fallen. His words were low-spoken, but each of his companions heard.

"In warfare it is common for a foe to hedge his adversary about so that fight he must. Thou art a woman and cunning, and lest thou join thyself to another and elude me ere the battle is on, I would better treat thee to a strategy. I shall wed thee first and woo thee afterward."

Ta-user leaned across the table, and sweeping the pawns away with her arms, said, with a smile:

"Quarreling over a game of drafts! Which is in distress—in need of allies?"

"Come thou and be my mercenary, Ta-user," Masanath said with impulsive gratitude. "Rameses hath lost and demands restitution beyond reason."

Har-hat had risen the instant the words had passed the prince's lips and left the group. He did not wish to let his face be seen. A dash of dark color grew in the heir's pallid cheeks, partly because he knew he had been heard, partly because he was angry at the princess' interruption.

"Strange," mused Menes once again, "that the phrases of war mark the babble of even the maidens these days. And half the revels end in quarrels. Though I be young in war experience, I would say the omens point to conflict in which Egypt shall be embroiled."

"Aye, Menes; and perchance thou wilt be measuring swords with a Hebrew ere the summer is old," Siptah said, speaking for the first time.

"Matching thy good saber-metal with a trowel or a hay-fork, Menes," Rameses sneered.

"Hold, thou doughty pride of the battling gods!" Menes cried laughingly to Rameses. "For once, I scout thy prophecies. The Hebrews are stirred up beyond any settling, save thou dost put them all to the sword, and that is a task that I would go to Tuat to escape. Thou wilt not work the Israelite to death. I can tell thee that!"

"Hast caught the infectious terror of the infant-scaring, bugbear Hebrew?" Rameses asked.

Menes leaned against the nearest knee and smiled lazily.

"If the gray-beard sorcerer did meet me in open field, protected only with bull-hide and armed with a spear, I would fight him till he said 'enough'; but who wants to go against an incantation that would mow down an army at the muttering? Not I; yea, Rameses, I am a craven in battle with a sorcerer."

"If he means to blast us, wherefore hath he not spoken the cabalistic word ere this?" the prince demanded.

"He had no personal provocation until late," the captain replied.

"Hath the taskmaster set him to making brick?" the prince laughed.

"Nay; but the priesthood plotted against his head, and he is angry."

Rameses raised himself and looked fixedly at the soldier. Again Menes laughed.

"Spare me, my Prince! It is no longer a state secret. It is out and over all Egypt. Why it came not to thine

ears I know not. Perchance every one is afraid to gossip to thee save mine unabashed self."

"Waster of the air!" Rameses exclaimed. "What meanest thou?"

"It seems that the older priests have a hieratic grudge against the Israelite, and when he returned into Egypt they set themselves, with much bustle, importance and method to silence him. Hither and thither they sent for advice, permission and aid, till all the wheels of the hierarchy were in motion, and the air quivered with portent and intent. Vain ado! Superfluous preparation! The very letter which gave them explicit and formal permission to begin to get ready to commence to put away the Hebrew, fell—by the mischievous Hathors!—fell into the hands of the victim himself!"

Rameses fell back into his chair, his lips twitching once or twice, a manifestation of his genuine amusement.

"As it follows, the Israelite is angry. So the witch-pot hath been put on, and in council with a toad and a cat and an owl, he thinketh up some especial sending to curse us with," the captain concluded.

"A proper ending," Rameses declared after a little. "Let men kill each other openly, if they will, but the methods of the ambushed assassin should recoil upon himself."

At this point it was seen that the Pharaoh and his queen were preparing to leave the hall. All the company arose, and after the royal pair had passed out the guests began to depart. Rameses left his party and, joining Har-hat, led the fan-bearer away from the company.

"It seems that thou, with others, heardest my words with Masanath," the prince began at once. "It is well, for it saves me further speech now. I want thy daughter as my queen."

Har-hat seemed to ponder a little before he answered. "Masanath does not love thee," he said at last.

"Nay, but she shall."

"That granted, there are further reasons why ye should not wed," the fan-bearer resumed after another pause. "Masanath would come between Egypt and Egypt's welfare. Thou knowest what thy marriage with the Princess Ta-user is expected to accomplish. At this hour the nation is in need of unity that she may safely do battle with her alien foes. If thou slightest Ta-user thou wilt add to the disaffection of Amon-meses and his party. Furthermore, thine august sire would not be pleased with thee nor with Masanath, nor with me. It is not my place to show thee thy duty, Rameses, but of a surety it is my place to refuse to join thee in thy neglecting of it."

Rameses contemplated the fan-bearer narrowly for a moment. "Come, thou hast a game," he said finally. "Out with it! Name thy stake."

"O, thou art most discourteous, my Prince," the fan-bearer remonstrated, turning away. But Rameses planted himself in his path.

"Stay!" he said grimly. "Dost thou believe me so blind as to think thee sincere? Thou canst use thy smooth pretenses upon the Pharaoh, but I understand thee, Har-hat. Declare thyself and vex me no further with thy subtleties." Har-hat measured the prince's patience before he answered.

"When thou canst use me courteously, Rameses," he said with dignity, "I shall talk with thee again. Meanwhile do not build on wedding with Masanath. I shall mate her with him who hath respect for her father."

For a moment Rameses stood in doubt. Could it be that this soulless man had scruples against giving him Masanath? But Har-hat, allowed a chance to leave the prince if he would, had not moved. Rameses understood the act. The fan-bearer was awaiting a propitious opportunity to name his price gracefully. The momentary warmth of respect died in the prince's heart.

"Out with it," he insisted more calmly. "What is it? Power, wealth or a wife? These three things I have to give thee. Take thy choice."

"I would have thee use me respectfully, reverently," Har-hat retorted warmly. "I would have thee speak favorably of me; I would have thee do me no injustice by deed or word, nor peril my standing with the king! This I demand of thee—I will not buy it!"

"To be plain," Rameses continued placidly, "thou wouldst insure to thyself the position of fan-bearer. Say on."

"I am fan-bearer to the king," Har-hat continued with a show of increasing heat, "and I would fill mine office. If thou art to be his adviser in my stead, do thou take up the plumes, and I will return to Bubastis."

"Once again I shall interpret. I am to keep silence in the council chamber and resign to thee the molding of my plastic father. It is well, for I am not pleased with ruling before I wear the crown. But

mark me! Thou shalt not advise me when I rule over Egypt. So take heed to my father's health and see that his life is prolonged, for with its end shall end thine adviserships. What more?"

"So thou observest these things I am satisfied."

"Gods! but thou art moderate. Masanath is worth more than that. Do I take her?"

"She does not love thee."

The prince waved his hand and repeated his question.

"I shall speak with her," Har-hat responded, "and give thee her word."

For a moment the prince contemplated the fan-bearer, then he turned without a word and strode out of the chamber. In a corridor near his own apartments he overtook the daughter of Har-hat. Her woman was with her.

The prince stepped before them.

The attendant crouched and fled somewhere out of sight. Masanath drew herself to the fullest of her few inches and waited for Rameses to speak.

"Come, Masanath," he said, "thou canst reach the limit of thy power to be ungracious and but fix me the firmer in my love for thee. I am come to tell thee that I have won thee from thy father."

"Thou hast not won me from myself," she replied.

"Nay, but I shall."

"Thou dost overestimate thyself," she retorted. Catching up the fan and chaplet that her woman had let fall she made as though to run past him. But he put himself in her way, and with shining eyes, caught her in his arms.

"There, there! my sweet. I shall do thee no hurt,"

he laughed, quieting her struggles with an iron embrace.

"Thou art hurting me beyond any cure now," she panted wrathfully.

"It is thy fault. Have I not said I am sated with submission? If thou wouldst unlock mine arms, kiss me and tell me thou wilt be my queen."

"Let me go," she exclaimed, choking with emotion.

"Better for thee to tell me 'yes'; thou wilt save thy father a lie."

She looked at him speechless.

"I have said. To-morrow he will tell me that thou hast promised to wed me—whether thou sayest it or not. Spare him the falsehood, Masanath, and me a heartache."

"Wilt thou slander my father to me?" she demanded. "Art thou a knave as well as a tyrant?"

"Nay, I have spoken truly. Sad indeed were thy fate, my Masanath, did the gods mate thee with a knave, having fathered thee with a villain. So I am come to know of a truth what is thy will."

"And I can tell thee most truly. Sooner would I sit upon the peak of a pyramid all my life than upon a throne with thee; sooner would I be crowned with fire than wear the asp of a queen to thee. My father may wed me to thee, but I will never love thee, nor say it, nor pretend it. Thou wilt not win a wife if thou dost take a queen by violence. Release me!"

"Thou dost rivet mine arms about thee."

She stiffened herself and savagely submitted to her imprisonment.

Rameses laughed and, bending her head back, kissed

her repeatedly and with much tenderness. She struggled madly, but he held her fast.

"This is but the beginning," he said in a low voice, "and I have won. The end shall be the same. I am a lovable lover, am I not, Masanath? Am I not good to look upon? Dost thou know a more princely prince, and is my father more of a king than I shall be? Where do I fail thee in thy little ideals? Am I harsh? Aye, but I am a king. Am I rough-spoken? Aye, because most of the world deserve it. Thou hast never felt the sting of my tongue, and never shalt thou unless thou breakest my heart. I have much to give thee; not any other monarch hath so much as I to give his queen. And yet I ask only thy love in return."

This was earnest wooing, which contained nothing that she might flout. So she strained away from him and sulked. Again he laughed.

"Khem and Athor and Besa have combed my heart and created a being of the desires they found therein! O, thou art mine, for the gods ordained it so." Again he kissed her, holding her in spite of her efforts to get away.

"There! carry thy hate of me only to the edge of sleep and dream sweetly of me."

He released her and continued down the hall.

As he turned out of the smaller passage into the larger corridor, Ta-user stepped forth from the shadow of a pillar. The huge column dwarfed her into tininess. The hall was but dimly lighted by a single lamp and that flared above her head.

Rameses paused, for she stood in his path.

"Not yet gone to thy rest?" he asked.

"Rest!" she said scornfully. "Gone to a night-long frenzy of relentless consciousness—weary tossing, wasted prayers. I have not rested since I left the Hak-heb."

Her voice sounded hollow in the great empty hall.

"So? Thou art ready for the care of the physicians by this, then, O my Sister."

"I am not thy sister."

"What! Hast quarreled with the gentle Seti?"

"Rameses, do not mock me. Seti does not even stir my pulses. He could not rob me of my peace."

"What temperate love! Mine makes my temples crack and fills mine hours with sweet distress."

Ta-user looked at him for a moment, then raising her hands, caught the folds of his robe over his breast.

"Rameses, how far wilt thou go in this trifling with the Lady Masanath?"

"To the marrying priests." Without looking at her, he loosed her hands, swung them idly and let them go.

"She does not love thee," she said after a little silence.

"Thy news is old. She told me that not a moment since."

Ta-user drew a freer breath. "Thou wilt not wed her, then."

"That I will. I have vowed it. Go, Ta-user, the hour is late. Have thy woman stir a potion for thee, and sleep. I would to mine own dreams. They yield me what the day denies."

"Stay, Rameses," she urged, catching at his robes once more. "I would have thee know something. But am I to tell thee in words what I would have thee

know? Surely I have not let slip a single chance to show thee by token. Art thou stubborn or blind, that thou dost not pity me and spare me the avowal?"

Rameses looked down at her upturned face without a softening line on his pallid countenance.

"Ta-user," he said deliberately, "had I been mummied and entombed I should have known thine intent. I marvel that thou couldst think I had not seen. Now, hast thou not guessed my mind by this? Have I not been sufficiently explicit? Must I, too, lay bare my heart in words?"

She did not speak for a moment. Then she said eagerly:

"Let not thy jealousy trouble thee concerning Seti —he is naught to me—I love him not—a boy, no more."

"Seti!" he exclaimed contemptuously. "I have no feeling against Seti save for his unfealty to the little child who loves him,—whose heart thou hast most deliberately broken."

"Not so," she declared vehemently. "I can not help the boy's attachment to me. She is a child, as thou hast said, and is easily comforted. Not so with maturer hearts like mine."

She put her arms about his neck, and flinging her head back, gazed at him with a heavy eye.

"O, wilt thou put me aside for Masanath? What is her little dark beauty compared to mine? How can she, who is not even a stately subject, be a stately queen? Wilt thou set the crown upon her unregal head, invest her with the royal robes, and yield thy homage to a scowl and a bitter word? And me, in whom there is no drop of unroyal blood, in whom

there is all the passion of the southlands and all the fidelity of the north, thou wilt humiliate. The gods made me for thee—schooled me for thy needs and shifted the nation's history so that thou shouldst have need of me. Look upon me, Rameses. Why wilt thou thrust me aside?"

She was not dealing with Seti, or Siptah, or any other whom she had bewitched. There was no spell in the topaz eyes for Rameses. If her sorcery affected him at all, it won no more than a cursory interest in her next move.

"The night is too short to recount my reasons," he replied calmly, as he put her arms away. "But I might point out the snarling cur, Siptah, for one, and a few other comely lords of Egypt."

"What hast thou done in thy life?" she cried. "I am no more wicked than thou; thou hast found delight in others beside whom I am all innocence."

"It may be. Who knows but there is somewhat of the vulture-nostril in man, tickled with a vague taint? But, even then, the sense is fleeting, more or less as the natures of men vary. A man hath his better moments, and how shall they be entirely pure in the presence of shame? Nay, I would not mate and live for ever with mine own sins."

"Then as thou dost permit her spotlessness to cover her hate, let my love for thee hide my sins. From the first I have loved thee unasked. She is all unwon."

"Thou hast said it. She is unwon. But doth the lion prey upon the carcass? Nay. His kill must be fresh and slain by his own might. Thou didst stultify thyself by thine instant acquiescence. Come, let us

make an end to this. The more said the more thou shalt have of which to accuse thyself hereafter."

But she dropped before him, her white robes cumbering his path, her arms clasping his knees.

"What more have I to do of which to accuse myself, O Rameses? Egypt knows why I came to court. Egypt will know why I shall leave it. What have I not offered and what hast thou given me? Where shall I find that refuge from the pitying smile of the nation? Spare my womanhood—"

"Ah, fie upon thy pretense, Ta-user! Art thou not shrewd enough to know how well I understand thee? Thou dost not love me. No woman who loves pleads beyond the first rebuff. Love is full of dudgeon. Thou dost betray thyself in thy very insistence. Thou beggest for the crown I shall wear, and if I were overthrown to-morrow thou wouldst kneel likewise to mine enemy. Thou hast no womanhood to lose in Egypt's sight. As thy caprice turned from Siptah to me, let it return thee to Siptah once again. And if thy heart doth in truth wince with jealousy, think on Io."

He undid her arms, flung her from him and disappeared into the dark.

CHAPTER XXVI

FURTHER DIPLOMACY

Masanath, suffocating with wrath and rebellion and overpowered with an exaggerated appreciation of her shame, tumbled down in the shadows of the narrow passage and wrapped her mantle around her head.

When she had wept till the creamy linen over her small face was wet and her throat hurt under the strain of angry sobs, and until she was sure that Rameses was gone, she picked herself up and went cautiously to the end of the passage to reconnoiter.

The prince stood under the single lamp in the great corridor, between her and the refuge of her chamber. Another was close to him, her hands upon his shoulders.

Masanath retired into the dusk and waited. When she looked again the hands were clasped about the prince's neck. Back into the shadows she shrank, pressing her tiny palms together in a wild prayer for Ta-user's triumph. After an interval she looked again in time to see Rameses undo the arms about his knees and fling the princess from him. Cold with dismay and shaking with her sudden descent from hope to despair, Masanath watched him disappear into the dark.

"O most ill-timed, iron continence!" she wailed under her breath. But the change which had come over

Ta-user interested her immediately. Fascinated, she forgot to hide again, but the light of the single lamp did not penetrate to her position.

The princess kept the posture of abandoned humiliation, into which Rameses had flung her, until the heir's footsteps died away up the corridor. Then she raised herself and faced the direction the prince had taken. Her lithe body bent a little, her rigid arms were thrust back of her, and the hands were clenched hard. Her head was forced forward, the long neck curved sinuously like a vulture's. She began to speak in a whisper that hissed as though she breathed through her words. Masanath felt her flesh crawl and her soft hair take on life. Not all the words of the sorceress were intelligible. At first only her ejaculations were distinct.

"Puny knave!" Masanath heard. "Well for thee I do not love thee, else thou shouldst sleep this night in the reeking cave of a paraschite, with the whine of feeding flies about thee for dreams. Well for me that I do not love thee, for thine instant death would rob me of the long revenge that I would liefer have! Share thy crown with me! When Ta-user hath done with thee thou shalt have no crown to share! Turned from Siptah for thee! How thou wilt marvel when thou learnest that I never turned from Siptah nor wooed thee with a single glance but for Siptah's sake. Go on! Sleep well! Have no regrets, for thy doom was spoken long before this night's haughty work. Rather do I thank thee for thy scorn. It robs me of qualms and adds instead a dark delight in that which I shall do!"

She turned toward Masanath, walking swiftly. The

fan-bearer's daughter, stricken with panic, fled, nor paused until she had passed far beyond the chamber of Ta-user.

Cowering in a friendly niche, she waited until the princess had disappeared, and then only after a long time was she sufficiently reassured to reach her own apartments.

It was the next day's noon before Masanath saw her father. Then he came with light step as she sat in her room. Approaching from behind her, he took her face between his hands, and tilting it back, kissed her.

"I give thee joy, Masanath. Thou hast melted the iron prince."

She rose and faced him. "Did Rameses tell thee I loved him?" she demanded, a faint hope stirring in her heart.

"Nay, far from it. He told me, and laughed as he said it, that if thy soft heart had any passion for him it was hate."

"Said he that? Nay, now, my father, thou seest I can not marry him." There was relief in her voice, and she drew near to the fan-bearer and invited his arms. He sat down instead, and drawing up a stool with his foot, bade her sit at his feet.

"Listen! It is a whim of the Hathors to conceal one's own feelings from him at times, that he may accomplish his own undoing, being blind. Much is at stake on thy love for the prince. Awake, Masanath! Thou dost love him; thou wilt wed him—and it shall go well with—all others whom thou lovest."

"Wouldst use me for a price, my father—wouldst barter thy daughter for something?" she asked in a tone low with apprehension.

"Ah, what inelegant words," he chid. "Thou dost miscall my purpose. Look, my daughter. Have I not served thee with hand and heart all thy life, asking nothing, sacrificing much? I, for one, have a debt against thee, and thou canst pay it in thy marriage to Rameses. Dost thou not love me enough to make me secure with the prince, and so, secure in mine adviser-ship to the king?"

Masanath arose slowly, as if her movements kept pace with the progress of her realizations. Thus far she had been a loving and a believing child. The genial knavishness of her father had never appeared as such to her. In her sight he was cheery, great and lovable. Most of all she had flattered herself that he loved her better than life, and that his nights were sleepless in planning for her happiness. Now, a terrifying lapse in his care, or a more terrifying display of his real character, appalled her.

He had placed his demand in the most irresistible form, by calling upon her dutifulness. Being obedient, she felt constrained to submit, but being spirited, with her heart already bestowed, she resisted.

She floundered wildly for testimony that would justify her rebellion in his sight. The memory of Tauser's threats came to her as unexpected and unbidden as all inspirations come.

"Shall I hold thee in thy position at the expense of Egypt's peace, if not at the expense of the dynasty?" she cried.

"By the heaven-bearing shoulders of Buto!" he responded laughingly, "thou dost put a high estimate on the results of thine acts. Add thereto, 'if not at the

expense of the Pantheon,' and thou shalt have all heaven and earth at thy mercy."

"Nay, my father, hear me! Thou knowest Ta-user—"

"O, aye, I know Ta-user—all Egypt knows her—more particularly, Rameses."

"Thou dost not fathom the evil in her—"

"Her fangs are drawn, daughter."

"Hear me, father. Last night, after Rameses—after he—after he left me, he met Ta-user. And the talk between them was of such nature that she knelt to him and he flung her off. They were between me and mine apartments, and I could not but know of it. When he left her she made such threats that it were treason for me to give them voice again. What she asked of him I surmise. It could not have been other than a prayer to him, to fulfil what was expected of him concerning her. Thou knowest the breach between the Pharaoh and his brother, Amon-meses, is but feebly bridged till Rameses shall heal the wound in marriage with Ta-user. His failure, added to the vehement contempt he displayed for her last night, shall make that breach ten times as deep and ever receding, so there can be no healing of it."

Har-hat flung his head back and laughed heartily.

"Thou timid child! frightened with the ravings of a discarded wanton. She and her following of churls can do nothing against the Son of Ptah. The moles in the necropolis are richer than they. None of loyal Egypt will espouse their cause, and without money how shall they get them mercenaries? Nay, why vex thee with matters of state? All that is required of thee is thy heart for Rameses, no more."

"Judge not for Rameses, I pray thee," she insisted, coming near him. "Knowing that I love him not, perchance he might be gentler with Ta-user did he see his peril."

Again Har-hat laughed.

"I am not blind, O little reluctant," he said. "I know the secret spring of thy concern for Egypt—for Ta-user—for Rameses. I have not told thee all the stake upon thy love for the prince. Does it not seem that since a maiden will not love one winsome man there must be another already installed in her heart?"

She drew back, changing color.

"How little of the court-lady thou art, Masanath," he broke off, looking at her face. "Thy sensations are too near the surface. Thou must teach thy face to dissemble. It was this very eloquence of countenance that betrayed thy foolish preferences. Mind thee, I know it to be but a maiden fancy which, discouraged, dies. But have a care lest it bring disaster upon him whom thou hast put in jeopardy of the fierce power of the prince."

Masanath's eyes widened with terror. The fan-bearer continued: "I have but to mention the name of Hotep—"

She clutched at her heart.

"Ah?" he observed with mild interrogation in the word. "How foolish thy caprice! Hotep does not thank thee. His marble spirit hath set its loves upon ink-pots and papyri and such pulseless things. How I should reproach myself if I must undo him—"

"Nay, bring no disaster on the head of the noble Hotep," she begged. "He—I—there is naught between us."

"It is even as I had thought. I shall tell Rameses and send him to thee," he said, moving away.

With a bound she was between him and the door.

"If he ask tell him there is naught between me and the royal scribe, but send him not hither," she commanded with vehemence.

"If thou art rebellious, Masanath, I must chasten thee."

"Threaten me not!" she cried, thoroughly aroused, "or by the Mother of Heaven, I shall demand audience with Meneptah and tell him what thou wouldst do."

"Bluster!" he answered with an irritating laugh.

"Hast won the sanction of the Pharaoh for this betrothal?" she demanded.

"Meneptah's will is clay in my hands," he replied contemptuously.

"Vex me further and I shall tell him that!"

He caught her arm, and though the fierce grasp pinched her, she knew by that she had gained a point.

"And further," she continued, gathering courage at each word, "I shall ask him why thou shouldst be so anxious to keep the breach between him and his brother and defeat his aims at peace."

His face blazed and he shook her, but she went on in wild triumph. "I have a confederate in Rameses. He loves thee not. And I have but to hint and ruin thee beyond the restoring power of the marriages of a thousand daughters!"

Har-hat's forte had been polished insult, but when the evil in him would have expressed itself in its own brutal manner he was helpless.

"Hotep—Hotep—" he snarled.

The name was potent. Again she recoiled.

"I shall yield him up to Rameses," he went on.

"And in that very hour thou dost, in that same hour will I charge thee with treason before the throne of Meneptah!" she returned recklessly.

The pair gazed at each other, breathless with temper.

"Wilt thou wed Rameses?" he demanded.

"So thou wilt avoid the name of Hotep in the presence of Rameses and wilt shield him as if his safety were to bring thee gain," she replied, thrusting skilfully, "I will wed the prince in one year. Furthermore, in that time I shall be free to go where and when I please, to dwell where I please and to be vexed with the sight of thee or that royal monster no more than is my desire. Say, wilt thou accept?"

He had twitted her about her frank face. He could not tell now but that she was fearless and had measured her strength. He did not know that within she trembled and felt that her threats were empty. But, being guilty in his soul, and facing righteousness, Harhat succumbed.

"Have it thy way, then, vixen," he exclaimed; "but remember, I hold a heavy hand above thy head and Hotep's!"

He strode out of her presence, and when she was sure he was gone, she fell on her face and wept miserably.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE HEIR INTERVENES

At Tanis, the next day after the arrival of Meneptah, there came a messenger from Thebes to Hotep, and the royal scribe retired to his apartments to read the letter.

And after he had read he was glad that he had secluded himself, for his demonstrations of relief at the news the message imparted were most extravagant and unrestrained. For the moment he permitted no reminder of Kenkenes' present plight to subdue his joy in the realization that his friend was not dead.

Having exulted, he read the letter again, and then he summoned all his shrewdness to his aid.

He would wait till the confusion of the court's settling itself had subsided before he presented the petition to Meneptah. Furthermore, he would relieve his underlings and write the king's communications with his own hand till he knew that the reply to Kenkenes had been sent. Har-hat should be watched vigilantly.

But order and routine were not restored in the palace of Meneptah. The unrest that precedes a national crisis had developed into irritability and pugnacity.

Tanis was within hearing of the plaints of Israel, and the atmosphere quivered with omen and portent.

Moses appeared in this place and that, each time nearer the temporary capital, and wherever he came he left rejoicing or shuddering behind him.

Meanwhile the fan-bearer laughed his way into the throne. Meneptah's weakness for him grew into stubborn worship. The old and trusted ministers of the monarch took offense and sealed their lips; the new held their peace for trepidation. The queen, heretofore meek and self-effacing, laid aside her spindle one day and, meeting her lord at the door of the council chamber, protested in the name of his dynasty and his realm.

But the king was beyond help, and the queen, angry and hurt, bade him keep Har-hat out of her sight, and returned to her women. Thereafter even Meneptah saw her rarely.

The rise of the fan-bearer was achieved in an incredibly short time. It proved conclusively that until this period an influence against Har-hat had been at work upon Meneptah, and seeing that Rameses had subsided, having cause to propitiate the father of the woman he would wed, the courtiers began to blame the prince and talk of him to one another.

He seemed lost in a dream. In the council chamber he lounged in his chair with his eyes upon nothing and apparently hearing nothing. But the slow shifting of the spark in his sleepy eyes indicated to those who observed closely that he heard but kept his own counsel. If Meneptah spoke to him he but seconded Har-hat's suggestions. But once again the observant ones noted that the fan-bearer did not advise at wide variance with any of the prince's known ideas. Thus far the most caviling could not see that Har-hat's favoritism

had led to any misrule, but the field of possibilities opened by his complete dominance over the Pharaoh was crowded with disaster, individual and national.

The betrothal of Rameses to Har-hat's daughter gave further material for contention. It seemed to indicate that the fan-bearer had builded for himself for two reigns.

Hotep's situation was most poignantly unhappy. He was fixed under the same roof with the man that had taken his love by piracy; he must greet him affably and reverently every day; he must live in daily contemplation of the time when he must meet Masanath also as his sovereign—the wife of the prince, whom he must serve till death. Hardest of all, he must wear a serene countenance and cover his sorrow most surely, for his own sake and for Masanath's.

Ta-user still remained at court. Seti, in a fume of boyish indignation at Rameses, attended her like a shadow. Among the courtiers there were others who were not alive to the true nature of the princess and who joined Seti in his resentment against the heir.

Amon-meses and Siptah, snarling and malevolent, had left the court abruptly on the morning of its departure for Tanis. The Hak-heb received them once again, and an ominous calm settled over that little pocket of fertility in the desert—Nehapehu.

Thus the court was torn with factions; old internal dissensions made themselves evident again, but the vast murmur in Goshen was heard above the strife.

All this had come to pass in the short space of a month. When half of that time had elapsed, Hotep, fearing to delay the petition of Kenkenes longer, lest conditions should become worse rather than better, met

the Pharaoh in the hall one day and gave him the writing. Earnestly the scribe impressed Meneptah with the importance of the petition and begged him to acquaint himself in an hour of solitude with its contents and the identity of the supplicant.

Meneptah promised and continued to his apartments. There Har-hat came in a few moments, and Meneptah, after his custom, gave over to him the state communications of the day, and after some little hesitation, tossed the petition of Kenkenes among them.

"Thou canst attend to this matter as well, good Har-hat. Why should I take up the private concerns of my subjects when I am already burdened with heavy cares? But do thou look to this petition faithfully. It may be important, and I know not from whom it is. I promised Hotep it should be given honest attention."

For seven days thereafter every letter sent by the king was written by Hotep. At the end of that time he met Meneptah again, and bending low before him, asked pardon for his insistence, and begged to know what disposition the Son of Ptah had made of the petition of his friend. He was irritably informed that the matter had been given over to the fan-bearer for attention, since the Pharaoh had been too oppressed with heavier matters to read the letter.

The state of the scribe's mind, after receiving the information, was indescribable.

He controlled himself before Meneptah, but he suffered no curb upon his feelings when he had returned to his own apartments. After a long time he succeeded in choking his anger, disgust and grief, realizing that each moment must be turned to account rather than wasted in railing.

He viewed the situation with enforced calm.

Har-hat was in full possession of the facts. He had the signet and was absolute master of Meneptah. The Hathors had surrendered Kenkenes wholly into the hands of his enemy. Furthermore, the fate of the Israelite seemed to be sealed. At the thought Hotep gnashed his teeth.

In his sympathy for his friend's strait, the scribe gave over his objections to Rachel. Kenkenes had suffered for her, and, if he would, he should have her.

Between the king and persuasion was Har-hat, vitally interested in the defeat of any movement toward the aid of Kenkenes. The one hope for the sculptor was the winning over of the Pharaoh, and only one could do it. And that was Rameses, who was betrothed to the love of Hotep, and against her will.

Nothing could have appeared more distasteful to the scribe than the necessity of prayer to the man for whom he cherished a hate that threatened to make a cinder of his vitals. But the more he rebelled the more his conscience urged him.

He flung himself on his couch and writhed; he reviled the Hathors, abused Kenkenes for the folly of sacrilege which had brought on him such misfortune; he execrated Meneptah, anathematized Har-hat and called down the fiercest maledictions on the head of Rameses. Having relieved himself, he arose and, summoning his servant, had his disordered hair dressed, fresh robes brought for him, and a glass of wine for refreshment. On the way to the palace-top he met Ta-user, walking slowly away from the staircase. Rameses, solitary and luxurious, was stretched

upon a cushioned divan in the shadow of a canopy over the hypostyle.

"The gods keep thee, Son of the Sun," Hotep said.

"So it is thou, Hotep. Nay, but I am glad to see thee. Methought Ta-user meant to visit me just now. Is there a taboret near?"

"Aye, but I shall not sit, my Prince."

"Go to! It makes me weary to see thee stand. Sit, I tell thee!"

Hotep drew up the taboret and sat.

"I come to thee with news and a petition," he began. "It is more fitting that I should kneel."

"Perchance. But exertion offends mine eyes in such delicious hours as these, and I will forego the homage for the sake of mine own sinews. Out with thy tidings."

"Thou dost remember thy friend and mine, that gentle genius, Kenkenes."

"I am not like to forget him so long as a bird sings or the Nile ripples make music. Osiris pillow him most softly."

"He is not dead, my Prince."

"Nay!" Rameses cried, sitting up. "The knave should be bastinadoed for the tears he wrung from us!"

"Thou wouldst deny my petition. I am come to implore thee to intercede for him."

Rameses bade him proceed.

"Thou art acquainted with the nature of Kenkenes, O Prince. He is a visionary—an idealist, and so firmly rooted are his beliefs that they are to his life as natural as the color of his eyes. He is a beauty-worshiper. Athor possesses him utterly, and her loveliness blinds

him to all other things, particularly to his own welfare and safety.

"In the beginning he fell in love, and a soul like his in love is most unreasoning, immoderate and terribly faithful. The maiden is beautiful—I saw her—most divinely beautiful. She is wise, for I saw that also. She is good, for I felt it, unreasoning, and when a man hath a woman intuition, a god hath spoken the truth to his heart. But she is a slave—an Israelite."

"An Israelite!"

Hotep bowed his head.

"By the gods of my fathers, I ought not to marvel! Nay, now, is that not like the boy? An Israelite! And half the noble maids of Memphis mad for him!"

"He is not for thee and me to judge, O Rameses," Hotep interrupted. "The gods blew another breath in him than animates our souls. For thee and me such conduct would be the fancies of madmen; for Kenkenes it is but living up to the alien spirit with which the gods endowed him. It might be torture for him to wed according to our lights."

"Perchance thou art right. Go on."

"It seems that Har-hat looked upon the girl, and taken by her beauty, asked her at the Pharaoh's hands for his harem."

"Ah, the—! Why does he not marry honorably?"

"It is not for me to divine," Hotep went on calmly. "The fan-bearer sent his men to take her, but she fled from them to Kenkenes, and he protected her—hid her away—where, none but Kenkenes and the maiden know. Har-hat is most desirous of owning her, but Kenkenes keeps his counsel. Therefore, Har-hat over-

took him in Tape, where he went to get a signet belonging to his father, and imprisoned him till what time he should divulge the hiding-place of the Israelite."

"Never was there a true villain till Har-hat was born! What poor feeble shadows have trodden the world for knaves before the fan-bearer came. Go on. Hath he put him to torture yet?"

"Aye, from the beginning, though not by the bastinado. He rends him with suspense and all the doubts and fears for his love that can haunt him in his cell. But I have more to tell. There was a signet, an all-potent signet, which belonged to the noble Mentu—"

"Aye, I remember," Rameses broke in. "My grandsire gave it to the murket in recognition of his great work, Ipsambul. It commands royal favor in the name of Osiris. That should help the dreamer out of his difficulty."

"Aye, it should, my Prince, but it did not. Kenkenes sent it to the Pharaoh, with a petition for his own freedom, but the cares of state were so pressing that the Son of Ptah gave the letter, unopened, to Har-hat for attention."

Rameses laughed harshly.

"Kenkenes would better content himself. The Hathors are against him," he cried. "Was there ever such consummate misfortune? What more?"

"Is it not enough, O Rameses?" Hotep answered sternly. "He hath suffered sufficiently. Now is it time for them, who profess to love him, to bestir themselves in his behalf. Thou knowest how near the fan-bearer is to the Pharaoh. Persuasion can not reach the king

that worketh against Har-hat. Thou alone art as potent with the Son of Ptah. Wilt thou not prove thy love for Kenkenes and aid him?"

Rameses did not answer immediately. Thoughtfully he leaned his elbow on his knee and stroked his forehead with his hand. His black brows knitted finally.

"My hands are tied, Hotep," he began bluntly. "I permit the sway of this knave over my father because I am constrained. Till he begins to achieve confusion or bring about bad government I must let him alone. There is no love between us. We have no quarrel, but I despise him for that very spirit in him which makes him do such things as thou hast even told me. If his offense had been against Egypt or the king or myself, I could balk him. But this is a matter of personal interest to him, which would be open and flagrant interference—"

Hotep broke in earnestly.

"Surely so small a matter of courtesy—if such it may be called—should not stand between thee and this most pressing need."

"Aye, thou hast said—if it were only a small matter of courtesy. But the breach of that same small courtesy entails great disaster for me. Thou knowest, O my Hotep, that I am betrothed to the daughter of Har-hat."

With great effort Hotep kept a placid face.

"The Lady Masanath would abet him who would aid Kenkenes," he said.

"Even so. But hear me, I pray thee, Hotep. This most rapacious miscreant would hold his favor with the king. He knew I loved Masanath, and he held her out of my reach till I should consent to coun-

tenance his advisership to my father. I consented—and should I lapse, I lose Masanath."

Hotep was on his feet by this time, his face turned away. Rameses could not guess what a tempest raged in his heart.

"But be thou assured," the prince continued grimly, "that only so long as Masanath is not yet mine, shall I endure him. After that he shall fall as never knave fell or so deserved to fall before. Aye,—but stay, Hotep. I have not done. I have some small grain of hope for this unfortunate friend of ours. The marriage hath been delayed. I shall press my suit, and wed Masanath sooner, if she will, and Kenkenes need not decay in prison—"

Hotep did not stay longer. He bowed and departed without a word.

"Out upon the man, I offered all I could," Rameses muttered, but immediately he arose and hurried to the well of the stairway.

"Hotep!" he called. The scribe, half-way down, turned and looked up.

"Return to me in an hour. Give me time to ponder and I may more profitably help thee," the prince commanded. Hotep bowed and went on.

The hour was barely long enough for the smarting soul of the scribe to soothe itself. Deep, indeed, his love for Kenkenes that he returned at all. Masanath's name, spoken so familiarly, so boastingly, by the prince was fresh outrage to his already affronted heart. It mattered not that Rameses did not know. His talk of marriage with Masanath was exultation, nevertheless. Once again, Hotep flung himself on his couch and wrestled with his spirit.

At the end of the hour, he went once again to Rameses. He was calm and composed, but he made no apology for his abrupt departure, when last he was there. Perhaps, however, he gained in the respect of Rameses by that lapse. The blunt prince was more patient with the sincere than with the diplomatic.

"Thou hast said," the prince began immediately, "that Har-hat hath imprisoned Kenkenes till what time he shall divulge the hiding-place of the Israelite?"

Hotep bowed.

"The fan-bearer charges him with slave-stealing?"

"And sacrilege," the scribe added. The prince opened his eyes. "Aye, Kenkenes carried his beauty-love into blasphemy. He executed a statue of Athor in defiance of the sculptor's ritual. For this also, Har-hat holds a heavy hand over him."

"A murrain on the lawless dreamer!" Rameses muttered. "Is there anything more?"

Hotep shook his head.

"He deserves his ill-luck. Mark me, now. He will not go mad with a year's imprisonment, and he will profit by it. Furthermore, he can not be persuaded into betraying the Israelite, if he knows how long and how much he will have to endure. Once sentenced, Har-hat can add nothing more thereto. Has he confessed?"

"To me, he did. I know not what he said to the Pharaoh. But the Goddess Ma broodeth on the lips of Kenkenes."

Rameses nodded, and clapped his hands. The attendant that appeared he ordered to bring the scribe's writing-case and implements. When the servant re-

turned. Hotep, at a sign from Rameses, prepared to write.

"Write thus to the jailer at Tape:

" 'By order of the crown prince, Rameses, the prisoner, Kenkenes, held for slave-stealing and sacrilege, is sentenced to imprisonment for one year—' "

Hotep lifted his pen, and looked his rebellion.

"Write!" the prince exclaimed. "I do him a kindness, with a lesson added. Were it in my power to free him I would not—till he had learned that the law is inexorable and the power of its ministers supreme. Go on—'at such labor as the prisoner may elect. No further punishment may be added thereto.' Affix my seal and send this without fail. Thou canst write whatever thou wilt to Kenkenes. For the Israelite, I shall not concern myself. The nearer friends to Kenkenes may look to her. Mine shall be the care only to see that they are not harassed by the fan-bearer. In this, I fulfil the law. Let Har-hat help himself."

He dropped back on his divan and Hotep slowly collected his writing materials and made ready to depart. Having finished, he lingered a little.

"A word further, O Rameses. Kenkenes is proud. He would liefer die than suffer the humiliation of public shame. Memphis believes him dead. None but thyself, Har-hat, the noble Mentu and I know of his plight. Har-hat hath no call to tell it. Mentu will not; I shall not. Wilt thou keep his secret also, my Prince?"

"Far be it from me to humiliate him publicly. Let him have a care, hereafter, that he does not humiliate himself."

"I thank thee, O Rameses."

Saluting the prince, Hotep departed.

That night he wrote to Kenkenes and to Mentu, and the two messengers departed ere midnight.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE IDOLS CRUMBLE

Meanwhile Kenkenes seldom saw a human face. Food and water in red clay vessels, bearing the seal of Thebes, were set inside his door by disembodied hands. At intervals he saw the keeper, always attended by the inevitable scribe, but the visit was a matter of inspection and rarely was the prisoner addressed.

Though he grew to expect these visits, each time the bar rattled down he trembled with the hope that the jailer brought him freedom. Each successive disappointment was as acute as the last, made more poignant by the torturing certainty that his hopes were vain. The effect of one was not at all counteracted by the other.

Some time after dawn the sun thrust a golden bar, full of motes, across the door, a foot above his head. In a space the beam was withdrawn. The heat and dust of the midday came, instead. Gnats wove their mazes in the narrow casement that opened on the outside world, and now and then the twitter of birds sounded very close to it. Kenkenes knew how they flashed as they flew in the sun. They were prodigal of freedom. At nightfall, if he stood at full height against the door, he could see a thread of cooling sky with a single star in its center.

This was all his knowledge of the world.

Hour after hour he paced the narrow length of the cell, till the circumscribed round made him dizzy. If he flung himself on his straw pallet, he did not rest. The mind has no charity for the body. If there is to be no mental repose it is vain to hope for physical. When the inactivity of his uneasy pallet became intolerable, he resumed his pace.

He expected the return of his messenger in twenty days after the man's departure. At the expiration of that time his suspense and apprehension became more and more desperate at the passing of each new day. In rapid succession he accepted and rejected the thought that the messenger had played him false, had been assassinated and robbed; that Meneptah had recalled the signet, or had added the penalty of suspense to his indorsement of Har-hat's fiat of imprisonment.

When the climax of his sensations was reached, his self-sufficiency collapsed and he entered into ceaseless supplication of the gods. He vowed costly sacrifices to them, adding promises of self-abnegation which became more comprehensive as his distress increased. At the end of a month he had consecrated everything at his command. Then he subsided into a numb endurance till what time his prayers should be answered.

Eight days later, about mid-afternoon, while he lay on his pallet, the door was flung open and his messenger stood without. With a cry, Kenkenes leaped to his feet and wrenched the scroll from the man's hand. With unsteady fingers he ripped off the linen cover and read.

The letter was from Hotep, conveying such information regarding his imprisonment as we already know.

It was couched in the gentlest terms, and contained that essence of hope which loving spirits can extract from the most desperate situation, for another's sake. But for all the kindly intent of the scribe, his news was none the less unhappy. The dreaded had come to pass, and the war between hope and fear was at an end. Kenkenes read the missive calmly, and paid the messenger according to his promise. The jailer, who had come with the man, read the sentence and bade the prisoner make his choice of labor.

"Anything, so it will but give me a glimpse of the horizon," he said.

"Thou wilt pay dearly for thy sky," the keeper cautioned him. "The softest labor is within doors."

"Give me my wish according to the command of the prince."

The jailer shrugged his shoulders. "As thou wilt. Make ready to follow the canal-workers, to-morrow."

When the door fell shut again, Kenkenes returned to his pallet and re-read the scroll.

A year's imprisonment! The sentence defined was the sum of daily shame, sorrow, homesickness and misanthropy. Shame in the proud man admits of no degrees of intensity. If it exist at all, it is superlative. To this was added the loss of Rachel. How little it would take to satisfy him, now that she was wholly denied to his eyes! Only to look down on her again, unseen, from his aery in the rocks over the valley!

Hotep had offered him hope, based on circumstantial evidence and fact. Har-hat could not add to his sentence. That was the only indisputable cheer he could give. But would Rameses stay the chief adviser's hand, seeing that the winning of Masanath

depended on the prince's neutrality, as Hotep had explained? If Rachel fled to Mentu, as Kenkenes had bidden her, could the murket protect her, even at his own peril? Might not the heavy hand of the powerful favorite fall also on the head of the king's architect? Wherein was the murket more immune than his son? Rachel's destruction seemed to be decreed by the Hathors.

Such was his thought, and he raised himself to curse the Seven Sisters, and growing reckless, he included the unhelpful gods in his maledictions. The blasphemy comforted him strangely, and he persisted till his heated brain was cooled.

At dawn the next day he laid aside his fillet of gold, his trappings and noble dress, and donning the kilt or shenti of the prisoners, was handcuffed to another malefactor and taken forth to the sun-white plain between Thebes Diospolis and the Arabian hills, to labor in the canals of the nome.

Here, looking continually upon crime, brutality and misery, he asked himself the divine motive in creating man, and having found no answer, he began to question man's debt to the gods.

He was going the way of all the weak in faith. He had pleaded with his deities, and they had not heard him. He asked himself what he had done to deserve their disfavor. The sacrilege of Athor was too slight an offense—if offense it were—and here again he paused, set his teeth and swore that he had done no wrong and the god or man that accused him was impotent, unjust and ignorant. Once again he asked himself what he had done to deserve ill-use at the hands of the Pantheon. They had turned a deaf ear

to him, and why should he render them further homage? The doctrine of divine Love, displayed through chastisement, was not in the Osirian creed.

His eyes grew bold through rebellion and he attacked the wild inconsistencies of the faith with the destructive instrument of reason. Each deduction led him on, fascinated, in his apostasy. Each crumbling tenet started another toward ruin. Finding no sound obstacle to stay him, he fell with avidity to rending the Pantheon.

But he found no cheer nor any hope that day when he told himself bitterly, "There is no God."

CHAPTER XXIX

THE PLAGUES

The court was gone and Masanath was making the most of each day of her freedom. Memphis was in a state of apathy, worn out by revel and emptied of her luminaries. Ta-meri, intoxicated with the importance of her position as lady-in-waiting to the queen, had departed with her husband, the cup-bearer. Io had returned to her home in On, with an ache in her brave little heart that outweighed even Masanath's for heaviness. The last of Seti's lover-like behavior toward her dated back to a time before the court had gone to Thebes—long, long ago.

Ta-user, also, had gone, but the fan-bearer's daughter did not regret her. The other ladies who remained in Memphis, frightened at the loftiness of Masanath's future, were uneasy in her presence and seemed more inclined to bend the knee before her than to continue the girlish companionship that had once been between them.

So she must entertain herself, if she were entertained at all.

For a time after the departure of Meneptah, Masanath had given herself up to tears and gloom. When she had worn out her grief, the elastic spirit of youth

reasserted itself and once again she was as cheerful as she felt it becoming to be under the circumstances.

The fan-bearer had taken a house for his daughter's use, during her year of solitary residence, and her own servants, a lady-in-waiting, the devoted Nari, Pepi, a courier and upper servant, lean, brown and taciturn, and several slaves, both black and white, had been left with her. The older daughter of the fan-bearer lived with her husband in Pelusium. Her home could have been an asylum for the younger, but Masanath was determined to know one year of absolute independence before she entered the long bondage of queenship.

It was now the middle of June, the height of Egyptian summer. In a little space the marshes, which had been, for eight months, favorite haunts of fowlers, would be submerged, for the inundation was not far away.

Masanath would hunt for wild-duck and marsh-hen, while there was yet time.

It was an hour after sunrise. Her raft, built of papyrus, was boat-shaped and graceful as a swan. Pepi was at the long-handled sweep in the stern. Masanath sat in the middle, which was heaped with nets, throw-sticks, and bows and arrows. A pair of decoy birds, tame and unfettered, stood near her, craning their small heads, puzzled at the movement of the boat which was undecipherable since they were motionless. Nari sat in the prow, her hands folded, her face quite expressionless. The service of the day was out of the routine, but as a good servant, she was capable of adapting herself to the change.

The little craft darted away from the painted land-

ing for pleasure boats, and reaching midstream, was turned toward the north. The current caught it and swept it along like a leaf.

As they passed the stone wharf at Masaarah, Nari looked toward the quarries with a show of interest on her face. She even caught her breath to speak. Masanath noted her animation.

"What is it, Nari?"

"Naught but a bit of gossip that came to mine ears, last night, and the sight of Masaarah urged me to tell it again. It is said the Hebrews of these quarries rose against the new driver and drove him out of the camp, crying, 'Return us our Atsu, return us our Atsu.'"

"What folly!" Masanath exclaimed. "If they had been the host which crowds Goshen to her bounds, it might serve. But this handful in rebellion against Egypt! The military of the Memphian nome will crush them as if they had been so many ants."

"I know," the serving-woman admitted. "The soldier I had it from, said that the city commandant would move against them by noon this day."

"The gods help them!" Pepi put in.

"Thy prayer is too late, Pepi," Masanath answered. "The gods should have cautioned them ere they took the step. And yet," she continued, musing, "straits may become so sore that aught but endurance is welcome."

Her servants looked at her and at each other, understanding.

Nari went on:

"But the soldier told me further that the Israelites had spent the night chanting and dancing before their

God, and it seems from this spot that the quarries are empty. They do not fear, boasting their God's care."

Masanath shook her head. "He must look to them at once, ere the soldiery fall upon them. His time for aid is short," she said.

A silence fell, and the raft passed below Masaarah. Again Nari spoke, proving that she had heard and thought upon the last words of her mistress.

"Are not the gods omnipotent and everywhere?"

"Aye, so hast thou been taught, Nari."

"Our gods, and the gods of every nation like them?" the serving-woman persisted.

"The gods of Egypt are so, and each nation boasts its gods equally potent."

"Mayhap the Hebrews' God will help them," Nari ventured.

Masanath was silent for a moment. "He hath deserted them for long," she said at last, "but they are hard-pressed. Mayhap their loud supplications will reach Him in His retreat."

"They boast that He hath returned."

"Let Him prove Himself," Masanath insisted stoutly.

When next she spoke there was no hint of the past serious talk in her voice.

"A pest on the ban," she exclaimed. "Look at the Marsh of the Discontented Soul. It fairly swarms with teal and coot, and see the snipe on the sand." She stood up and watched the sandy strip they were nearing. They were a goodly distance out from the shore, but Pepi poled nearer midstream. "The pity of it," she sighed; "but I doubt not the place swarms with crocodile, also."

She sat down again, and looked at the decoy birds. Their timidity had increased into actual fear. Masanath reached a soothing hand toward one of them and it fled. The motion of the poling-arm of Pepi frightened it again, and with a flirt of its wings it retreated toward Masanath.

"Stop a moment, Pepi," she said. "Let me quiet this frightened thing. I can not fathom its terror."

"The unquiet soul, my Lady," Nari whispered, in awe.

"Strange that the gods gifted the creatures with keener sight than men," Masanath answered, somewhat disturbed. She moved toward the bird, talking softly, but the persuasion was as useless as if the decoy had been a wild thing. At the nearer approach of the small hand it took wings and flew. The mate followed, unhesitating. The shining distance toward the west swallowed them up.

The trio on the raft looked at one another.

"Nay, now, saw ye the like before?" Masanath exclaimed, the tone of her voice divided between astonishment and irritation at the loss of her pets.

"Let us leave this vicinity," Pepi said, suiting the action to the word, "it is unholy." He seized the sweep and drove the raft about, poling with wide strokes. At that moment, a cry, which was more of a hoarse whisper, broke from his lips.

"Body of Osiris! The river! the river!"

Masanath leaned on one hand and looked over the side of the raft. With a bound and a shivering cry, Nari was cowering beside her, the little craft tossing on the waves at the force of the leap. Instantly, Pepi was at her other side, on his knees, praying and shak-

ing. And together the trio huddled, but only one, Masanath, was brave enough to watch what was happening.

From the bottom of the Nile a turbid convection was taking place, as if the river silt had been stirred up, but the turning current was assuming a dull red tinge. The action had been rapid. Already the stain had predominated, streaks of clear water, only here and there, clarifying the opaque coloring. The boat rode half its depth in red, the paddle dripped red, the splashes of water within on the bottom were red, the sun shone broadly into the mirroring red, a sliding, reeking red! A lavender foam broke its bubbles against the drifting raft and a tepid, invisible vapor, like a moist breath, exhaled from the ensanguined surface.

Schools of fish, struggling and leaping, filled the space immediately above the water, and cumbered the raft with a writhing mass. Numberless crocodiles bounded into the air, braying, snorting, rending one another and churning the river into froth by their hideous battle. Dwellers of the deep water drifted into the upper tide—monsters of the muck at the Nile bottom, turtles, huge crawfish, water-newts, spotted snakes, curious bleached creatures that had never seen the day, great drifts of insects, with frogs, tadpoles—everything of aquatic animate life, came up dead or dying terribly. Along either bank water-buffalo and wallowing swine, which had been in the pools near the river, clambered ponderously, snorting at every step.

Vessels were putting about and flying for the shore. From the prow of one tall boat, with distended sails, a

figure was seen to spring high and disappear under the red torrent. Rioting crews of river-men fought for first landing at the accessible places on the banks. Memphis shrieked and the pastures became compounds of wild beasts that deafened heaven with their savage bellowing.

Pepi and Nari had no thought of saving themselves. It was Masanath who must save them. They clung to her, dragging her down with their arms when she attempted to rise. Bereft of reason, they made the liquid echoes of the river ring with wild cries of mortal terror.

Masanath had sufficient instinct left to urge her to fly. With a mighty effort she shook off her servants and sprang to the sweep. Instantly they made to follow her, but she threatened them with a hunting-stick. The combined weight of the three in the stern would have swamped the frail boat.

Seizing the sweep she poled with superhuman strength toward the nearest shore—the Marsh of the Discontented Soul. If she remembered the spirit, she forgot her fear of it. Any terror was acceptable other than isolation on this mile-wide torrent of blood.

The raft grounded, and as a viscous wash of red lapped across it, she leaped forth, landing with both feet in the horror. She floundered out and crying to her servants to follow her, fled like a mad thing up the sandy stretch toward the distant wall of rock.

The boat, lightened of her weight, received a backward thrust as she leaped, and drifted out of the reeds. The heavy current caught it and swept it across the smitten river to the Memphian shore. It bore two insensible figures.

Masanath ran, thinking only to leave the ghastly flood behind. Her wet over-dress flapped about her ankles. It, too, was stained, and she tore if off as she ran. Ahead of her was a sagging limestone wall, with no gap, but Masanath, hardly sane, would have dashed herself against it, if hands had not detained her.

"Blood! Blood!" she shrieked. "Holy Ptah save us!"

"Peace!" some one made answer. "God is with us."

The voice was calm and reassuring, the hands firm. Here, then, was one who was strong and unafraid, and therefore, a safe refuge. No longer called upon to care for herself, Masanath fell into the arms of the brave unknown and ceased to remember.

Consciousness returned to her slowly and incompletely. Horror had dazed her, and her surroundings, but faintly discovered in an all-enveloping gloom, were not conducive to mental repose and clearness.

She became aware, first, that she was somewhere hidden from the sunshine and beyond reach of the strange odor from the Nile.

Next she realized that she was sheltered in a cave; that slender lines of white daylight sifted through the interstices of a door; that a lamp was burning somewhere behind a screen; that a hairy thing sat in a corner and looked at her with half-human eyes, and that, as she shrank at the sight, the warm support under her head moved and a fair face, framed with golden hair, bent over her.

Then her eyes, becoming clearer as her recollection returned, wandered away toward the walls of her shelter. They had been hewn by hands. There was an opening in one side, leading into another and a

darker crypt. Was not this a tomb? She was in the Tomb of the Discontented Soul! Terrified, she struggled to gain her feet and fly, but the awful memory of the plague without returned to her overwhelmingly. Gentle hands restrained her, and the same voice that had sought to soothe her before, continued its soft comforting now.

"Thou art safe and sheltered," she heard. "No evil shall befall thee."

Was this the spirit of the tomb? If so, it was most lovely and kindly. But a solemn voice issued out of the dark cell beyond. This was the spirit, of a surety. She cowered against her fair-haired protector and shuddered. But the maiden answered the voice in a strange tongue. Masanath would have known it to be Hebrew, had she been composed. But now it was mystic, cabalistic.

Presently the maiden addressed her.

"Deborah asks after thee, Lady. How shall I tell her thou findest thyself?"

"Oh, I can not tell," Masanath answered. "What has happened? Is it true or did I go mad?"

The Israelite smoothed her hair. "It is a plague," she said.

"Then the hand of Amenti is on us," the Egyptian shuddered. "Whither shall we flee?"

"Ye can not flee from the One God," the voice from the crypt said grimly.

"Nay, but what have I done to vex the gods?" Masanath insisted. "O let me go hence. Where are my servants?"

"It is better for thee to bide here," the voice went

on relentlessly. "For outside the sheltering neighborhood of the chosen people, the hand of the outraged God shall overtake Egypt and scorch her throat with thirst and make her veins congeal for want of water."

Masanath gained her feet, crying out wildly:

"My servants! Where are they? Let me forth."

The Israelite put an assuring arm about her. "Thou wilt not dare to face the Nile again," she warned. "Stay with us."

"To starve! To perish of thirst! To die of pestilence! The gods have left us. We are undone!"

"Aye, the gods have left you," the voice continued harshly. "Ye are given over to the vengeance of the God of Abraham. Howl, Egypt! Rend thyself and cover thy head with ashes. Thy destruction is but begun. For a hundred years thou hast oppressed Israel. Now is the hour of the children of God!"

Masanath wrung her hands, but the voice went on.

"As the Nile flows, so hath the blood of Israel been wasted by the hand of Egypt. Now shall the God of Abraham drain her veins, even so, drop for drop. For the despoiling of Israel shall her pastures and stables be filled with stricken beasts—for the heavy hand of the Pharaohs shall the heavens thunder and scourges fall. And the wrath of God shall cool not till Egypt is a waste, shorn of her corn and her vineyards and her riches, and foul with dead men."

Nothing could have been more vindictive than this disembodied voice. Masanath thrust her fingers through her hair, and drawing her elbows forward, sheltered her face with them.

"When have I offended against the Hebrew?" she

cried, sick with terror. "Why should your awful God destroy the innocent and the friend of Israel among the people of Egypt?"

Rachel, who had stood beside her, with an increasing cloud on her face, now spoke in Hebrew. There was mild protest in her tones.

"The plague will pass," the voice from the inner crypt continued. "Seven days will it endure, no more."

"Deborah is mystic," Rachel added softly, "and is gifted with prophetic eyes. Much hath she suffered at Egypt's hands, and her tongue grows harsh when she speaks of the oppression."

"Nay, but let me go," Masanath begged. "Where are my servants? Came they not after me when I fled?"

"None followed thee, Lady, and thy raft went adrift."

"Let me out of this hideous place, then, for I must seek them. They may be dead."

Her tone was imperious, and Rachel, silently obedient, led her to the entrance and pushed aside the door. Instantly the terrible turmoil over Egypt smote upon her ears; next she saw the Nile, moving slowly, black where its clear surfaces had been green, scarlet and froth-ridden where the sun had shone upon transparent ripples and white foam; after that, the strange odor came to her, recalling the smell of the altars, but now magnified till it was overpoweringly strong. She sickened and turned away.

Setting the door in place, Rachel led her back into a corner of the outer chamber and laid her down on the matting there.

"The Lord God will care for thy servants. Fret thyself no further, but be content here until the horror shall pass. I shall attend thee, so thou shalt not miss their ministrations." The Israelite spoke with gentle authority, smoothing the dark hair of her guest. Command in the form of persuasion is doubly effective, since it induces while it compels. Masanath was most amenable to this manner of entreaty, since it disarmed her pride while it governed her impulses. Thus, though her inclination urged against it, she ate when the Israelite brought her a bit of cold fowl and a beaker of wine at midday and again at sunset. And at night, she slept because the Israelite told her she was safe and bade her close her eyes.

But once she awoke. The lamp burned behind a wooden amphora rack and the interior of the stone chamber was not dark. The voice in the inner chamber was still and the human-eyed beast in the corner was now only a small hairy roll. In the silence she would have been dismayed, but close beside her sat the Israelite. One hand toyed absently with the golden rings of a collar about her throat. The face was averted, the hair unplaited and falling in a shower of bright ripples over the bosom and down the back. The beauty of the picture impressed itself on Masanath, in spite of her drowsiness. But as well as the beauty, the dejection in the droop of the head, the unhappiness on the face, were apparent even in the dusk. Here was sorrow—the kind of sorrow that even the benign night might not subdue. Masanath was well acquainted with such vigils as the golden Israelite seemed to be keeping.

Her love-lorn heart was stirred. She spoke to Rachel softly.

"Come hither and lie down by me," she said. "I am afraid and thou art unhappy. Give me some of thy courage and I will sorrow with thee."

The Israelite smiled sadly and obeyed.

It was dawn when the fan-bearer's daughter awoke again.

The door had been set aside, and on the rock threshold a squat copper lamp was sending up periodic eruptions of dense white vapor. Rachel was feeding the ember of the cotton wick with bits of chopped root. The breeze from the river blew the fumes back into the cave, filling the dark recesses with a fresh and pungent odor.

Masanath, wondering and remembering, raised her head to look through the opening. Day was broad over Egypt, and the turmoil had subsided. The silence was heavy. But the Nile was still a wallowing torrent of red.

She sank back and drew the wide sleeves of her dress over her face. Rachel put the lamp aside, set the door in place and came to her.

"Thou art better for thy long sleep," she said. "Now, if thou canst bear, as well, with the meager food this house affords, the plague will not vex thee sorely." Then, in obedience to the Israelite's offer, Masanath sat up and suffered Rachel to dress her hair and bathe her tiny hands and face with a solution of weak white wine.

"The water which we had stored with us is also corrupted. I fear we shall thirst, if we have but wine to wet our lips," Rachel explained.

"Thou dost not tell me that ye abide in this place?" the fan-bearer's daughter asked, taking the piece of fowl and hard bread which Rachel offered her.

"Even so," Rachel responded after a little silence.

"Holy Isis! guests of a spirit! What a ghastly hospice for women! How came ye here?"

For a moment there was silence, so marked that Masanath ceased her dainty feeding and drew back a little.

"Are ye lepers?" she asked in a frightened voice.

"Nay, we are fugitives," Rachel answered.

"Fugitives! What strait brought you to seek such asylum as this?"

Again a speaking pause.

"Who art thou, Lady?" Rachel asked, at last.

"I am Masanath, daughter of Har-hat, fan-bearer to the Pharaoh."

"And thou art a friend of the oppressed?" the Israelite continued.

"It is my boast before the gods," the Egyptian answered with dignity.

"I am Rachel, of Israel, daughter of Maai, and I have fled from shame. In all Egypt, this is the one and only refuge for such as I. If my hiding-place were published, no help could save me from the despoiler. My one protector is she who lies within. She is my foster-mother, old and ill from abuse at the hands of brutal servants. Thou hast my story."

As Rachel ceased, Deborah called from within.

"There is more," she said. "Come hither. I am moved to tell thee."

Masanath obeyed with hesitation and, pausing in the doorway of the inner chamber, heard the story of

the Israelites. Great was her perplexity and her sorrow when she heard the name of Kenkenes spoken calmly and without grief. They did not know he was dead! She held her peace till the story was done. How much more would her heart have been tortured could the old woman have given her the name of the offending noble! Instead, all unsuspecting, she heard the story of Har-hat's wrong-doing with now and then an exclamation of indignation, condemning him heartily in her soul.

"The time for the Egyptian's return is long past, but he will come soon," Deborah concluded.

Masanath slowly turned her head and looked at Rachel. This, then, was the love of that dear, dead artist, for whom Memphis mourned and had ceased to wait. How doubly grievous his loss, for Rachel was undone thereby! How heart-breaking to see her wait for him who would come no more! Masanath choked back her tears and said, when she was composed again:

"Ye need not molder in this cave. I can hide you in Memphis."

"Nay, we will await him here."

"But the Nile will be upon your refuge in three weeks. Ye would starve if ye drowned not," the Egyptian protested earnestly.

"It may be we shall not wait so long," Rachel put in.

Masanath looked at her while she thought busily. "If I tell it, I break a heart. But if they bide here, they die. None other will come to them by chance or on purpose."

"I would not risk it," she answered. Returning to

the pallet of matting she finished her breakfast in silence. After a little sigh she glanced at the wine in one of the small amphoræ which Rachel had brought to her as a drinking-cup. "Mayhap the plague is past," she said, hinting, "and I am athirst."

Rachel took up another jar and went forth. The hairy creature in the corner, tethered to the amphora rack, slipped his collar and followed her.

As soon as the Israelite was gone, Masanath went into the inner chamber. Standing by the old woman, who lay upon a mattress, set on the top of the sarcophagus, she said hurriedly:

"Ye may not remain here. Kenkenes is known to me and he will not return."

"Thou dost not tell me he was false to us," Deborah exclaimed. "Nay, I will not believe it," she declared.

"Nay, he was the soul of honor, but he is dead."

"Dead!" the old woman cried, catching at her dress.

"Hush! Tell her not!"

"Aye, thou art right. Tell her not! But—but how did he die?"

"By drowning. His boat was discovered battered and overturned among the wharf-piling at Memphis, some weeks agone."

The old woman was silent for a moment and then she shook her head.

"He is a resourceful youth and he may have procured another boat and set this one adrift to deceive his enemies. Yet, the time has been so long, it may be; it may be."

"None in Memphis doubts it. His father hath given him up and his house and his people are in mourning. But we may not lose this moment in surmises. Wilt

thou go with me into Memphis—if this sending is withdrawn?"

"There is no other choice," Deborah answered after some pondering. "Kenkenes offered us refuge with his father—alas! that the young man should die!" After shaking her head and muttering to herself in her own tongue, she went on. "But Rachel hesitated to accept, at first from maiden shyness, though now she hath a secret fear, I doubt not, that the Egyptian may have played her false. The sorry news must be told her ere she would go."

"Nay, keep it from her yet a while. Tell her not now."

"How may we?" Deborah asked helplessly.

"Listen. I am a householder in Memphis for a year. The place is secure from much visiting and only my trusted servants are there. They will not tell her—none else will—thou and I shall keep discreet tongues, but if the fact creep out, in the way of such things, we need not accuse ourselves of killing her hope. As thou sayest, the young man may not be dead. But let us not risk anything.

"And furthermore," she caught up the line of her talk before Deborah could answer, "I may as well work good out of an evil I can not escape. I am betrothed to the heir of the crown of Egypt—"

Deborah flung up her hand, drawing away in her amazement.

"Thou! A coming queen over the proud land of Mizraim—a guest in the retreat of enslaved Israel!"

Masanath bent her head. "Ye, in your want and distress, are not more poor or wretched than I."

The old Israelite's brilliant eyes glittered in the dark.

"Hold!" she exclaimed. "Thou art not a slave—"

"Nay, am I not?" Masanath rejoined swiftly. "A slave, a chattel, doubly enthralled! But enough of this. I would have said that if I wed the prince, I can ask Rachel's freedom at his hands."

"So thou canst," Deborah said eagerly—but before she could continue, Rachel appeared at the outer opening, the amphora held by one arm, the ape by the other. Her face was alight with a smile that seemed dangerously akin to tears.

"Here is water, clean and fresh, but the Nile is bank-full of the plague. It was Anubis that showed me!" She lowered the amphora into the rack and took up the linen band the ape had slipped. "Oh, it is ungrateful to tie thee, Anubis," she went on, "but thou must not betray us, thou good creature."

"It was Anubis!" Deborah repeated inquiringly.

"Aye. Not once did the hideous sight disturb him. He was athirst and he made me a well in the sand with his paws. See how Jehovah hath sent us succor by humble hands." She stroked the hairy grotesque and tethered him reluctantly.

Deborah muttered under her breath. "I liked the creature not, since he made me think of the abominable idolatries of Mizraim, but he hath served the oppressed. He shall be more endurable to me."

The night fell and the dawn came again and again, but holy Hapi was defiled. Hour by hour the fuming lamp was set before the entrance, the door was put a little aside, that the entering air might be purified for those within. When the aromatic was ex-

hausted, Rachel sought for the root once more, among the herbs at the river-bank; for the atmosphere, unsweetened, was beyond endurance.

Never a boat appeared on the water, nor was any human being seen abroad. Egypt retired to her darkest corner and shuddered.

But after the seven days were fulfilled, the horror on the waters was gone. It went as miasma is dispelled by the sun and wind—as pestilence is killed by the frost—unseen, unprotesting. The lifting of the plague was as awesome as its coming, but it was not horrible. That was the only difference. Egypt rejoiced, but she trembled nevertheless and went about timidly.

The Israelite and the Egyptian carried the punt, the boat of Khafra and Sigur, and launched it on the clean waters. Then they prepared themselves and Deborah and Anubis for a journey, and ere they departed, Masanath, at Rachel's bidding, wrote with a soft soapstone upon the rock over the portal of the tomb, the whereabouts of its whilom dwellers:

"Her, whom thou seekest, thou wilt find at the mansion of Har-hat in the city."

At sunset, Rachel, all unsuspecting, was sheltered in the house of her enemy.

Masanath's servants had sought for her, frantically and without system or method. Pepi and Nari had been saved by the gods. They did not know where she had gone, and nothing human or divine could have driven them over the Nile to search for her in the Arabian hills. And for that reason likewise, they did not notify Har-hat of his daughter's loss. The

messenger would have had to cross the smitten river.

They intended to send for the fan-bearer, but they waited for the plague to lift. When it was gone, Masanath returned to them.

CHAPTER XXX

"HE HARDENED HIS HEART"

The Nile rose and fell and the seasons shifted until eight months had passed. The period was inconsiderable, but its events had never been equaled in a like space, or a generation, or a whole dynasty, or in all the history of Egypt.

When the ancient Hebrew shepherd from Midian first demanded audience with Meneptah, Egypt was autocrat of the earth and mistress of the seas. Her name was Glory and Perpetual Life and her substance was all the fullness of the earth and the treasures thereof. But eight months after the Hebrew shepherd had gone forth from that first audience, how had the mighty fallen! She was stripped of her groves and desolated in her wheat-fields; her gardens were naked, her vineyards were barren, and the vultures grew fat on the dead in her pastures. About the thrice-fortified walls of her cities her gaunt husbandmen were camped, pensioners upon the granaries of the king. Her commerce had stagnated because she had no goods to barter; her society ceased to revel, for her people were called upon to preserve themselves. Her arts were forgotten; only religion held its own and that from very fear. Egypt was on her knees, but the gods were aghast and helpless in the face of

the hideous power of the unsubstantial, unimaged God of Israel.

Never had a monarch been forced to meet such conditions, but in all the mighty line of Pharaohs no feebler king than Meneptah could have faced them. In treating with the issue he had fretted and fumed, promised and retracted, temporized with the Hebrew mystic or stormed at him, hesitated and resolved, and reconsidered and deferred while his realm descended into the depths of ruin and despair.

It would seem that the dire misfortunes would have pressed the timid monarch into immediate submission. But a glance at conditions may explain the cause of his obduracy.

At this period in theological chronology, human attributes for the first time were eliminated from the character of a god. Moses depicted the first purely divine deity. Omnipotence was ascribed to the gods, but Pantheism being full of paradoxes, the gods were not omnipotent. Loud as were the panegyrics of the devout, the devout recognized the limitations of their divinities. None had ever dreamed of a deity that was actually omnipotent, actually infinite. Meneptah measured the God of Israel by his own gods. Furthermore, the miracles did not amaze him as they appalled Egypt. He was exceedingly superstitious; in his eye the most ordinary natural phenomenon was a demonstration of the occult. No matter that the advanced science of his time explained rainfall, unusual heat or cold, over-fruitful or unproductive years, pestilence and sudden death, eclipses, comets and meteors,—he believed them to be the direct results of sorcery. Calamitous as the effects may have been upon other peo-

ple, he had ever escaped harm from these sources. It was not strange that in time he ceased to fear miracles, and the demonstrations of Moses were not so terrifying, inasmuch as they did not greatly affect him.

His horses died, but Arabia was near to replenish his stables; the pests annoyed him, but his servants fended them from him; the blains troubled him, but his court physicians were able and gave him relief; the thunders frightened him, but his fright passed with the storm. Whenever the sendings became unendurable he had but to yield to gain a respite, and then he forgot the experience in a day. Meanwhile he ate, slept and walked in the same luxury he had known in happier years.

Therefore, Meneptah neither realized his peril nor was personally much aggrieved by the troublous times.

It did not occur to him that all the people of his realm were not sheltered against the plagues by wealth and many servants. He could not understand why Egypt should be restive under the same afflictions that he had borne with fortitude. Summoning all evidence from his point of view, he was able to present to himself a case of personal persecution and ill-use. The Hebrews belonged to him, and because he held them their God afflicted Egypt. Egypt complained and would have him sacrifice his private property, his slaves, for its sake. To the peevish king the demand was unreasonable. Yet he was not extraordinary in his behavior. Unselfishness was not an attribute of ancient kings.

Meneptah was a man that wished to be swayed. He craved approbation and was helpless without an

abettor. His puny ideas had to be championed by another before they became fixed convictions. After the plague of locusts, the Hebrew question reached serious proportions. Har-hat had estranged most of the ministers, and in his strait Meneptah felt vaguely and for the first time that he needed the acquiescence of others in addition to the fan-bearer's ready concord.

One early morning, in a corridor leading from the entrance, he met Hotep. A sudden impulse urged him to consult his scribe.

"Where hast thou been?" he asked, noticing Hotep's street dress.

"To the temple, O Son of Ptah."

"What hast thou to ask of the gods that thy king can not give thee?"

Hotep hesitated, and the color rushed into his cheeks. The Hathors tortured him with an opportunity he dared not seize. How could he ask for Masanath?

"I went to pray for that which all Egyptians crave at this hour—the succor of Egypt," he said, instead.

Meneptah signed his scribe to follow him to a seat near by.

"Why may I not require of thee the services of a higher minister?" he began, after he had seated himself. "Never hast thou failed me, and I can not say so much of the great nobles above thee. Serve me well in this, Hotep, and thou mayest take the place of some one of these."

"Let me but serve thee," the scribe returned placidly; "that is reward in itself."

"Thou knowest," the king began, plunging into the heart of the question, "that I yielded to these ravening wolves, Mesu and Aaron. I have consented

to release the Israelites. But other thought hath come to me in the night. Thou knowest that no evil hath befallen the land of Goshen. Har-hat explaineth this strange thing by the location of the strip. The Nile toucheth it not and rains fall there. Furthermore the winds blow differently in that district, and withal the hand of Rannu of the harvests hath sheltered it. It may be, but to me it seemeth that the Hebrew sorcerer hath cast a protecting spell over the spot. But whatever the cause, the race of churls and their riches have escaped misfortune. Thinkest thou not, good Hotep, that, if they must go, we may by right require their flocks of them to replenish the pastures of Egypt?"

Surely the Hathors were exploiting themselves this day. Another opportunity for good and what would come of it? Hotep knew the man with whom he dealt. Still it were a sin to slight even an unprofitable chance that seemed to offer alleviation for Egypt. He would proceed cautiously and do his best.

"Be the little lamp trimmed never so brightly, O Son of Ptah, it may not help the sun. Thou art monarch, I am thy slave. How can I mold thee, my King?"

"Others have swayed me, thou modest man."

"In that hour when thou wast swayed, O Meneptah, another than thyself ruled over Egypt."

Meneptah looked in amazement at his scribe. He had never considered the influence of Har-hat in that light, but, by the gods, it seemed strangely correct. He straightened himself.

"Be thou assured, Hotep, that I weigh right well whatever counsel mine advisers offer me before I indorse it."

Hotep bowed. "That I know. And for that reason do I hesitate to give thee my little thoughts. It would hurt the man in me to see them thrust aside."

"Thou evadest," Meneptah contended smiling. "Wherefore?"

"Because, O King, I should advise against thine inclinations."

"Wherefore?" Meneptah demanded again, this time with some asperity.

"We hold the Hebrews," was the undisturbed reply; "through destruction and plague we have held them. They boast the calamities as sendings from their God. Egypt's afflictions multiply; every resort hath failed us. One is left—to free the slaves and test their boast."

Meneptah's face had grown deprecatory.

"Dost thou espouse the cause of thy nation's enemy?" he asked.

"I espouse the cause of the oppressed, and which, now, is more oppressed—Egypt or the Hebrew?"

This was different sort of persuasion from that which the king had heard since Har-hat took up the fan. The scribe was compelling him by reason; the man's personality was not entering at all into the argument. Meneptah's high brows knitted. He felt his feeble resolution filter away; his inclination to hold the Hebrews stayed with him, but the power to withstand Hotep's strong argument was not in him.

"What wouldst thou have me do?" he asked querulously.

"I am but a mouthpiece for thy realm; I counsel not for myself. The strait of Egypt demands that thou

set the Hebrew free, yield his goods and his children to him, and be rid of him and his plagues for ever."

Hotep spoke as if he were reciting a law from the books of the great God Toth. His tone did not invite further contention. He had read the king his duty, and it behooved the king to obey. A silence ensued, and by the signs growing on Meneptah's face, Hotep predicted acquiescence. It can not be said, however, that he noted them hopefully. Much time would elapse in which much contrary persuasion was possible before Israel could depart from Egypt.

Rameses came out of the dusk at the end of the corridor. The king raised himself eagerly and summoned his son.

"Hither, my Rameses!"

With suspense in his soul, Hotep saw the prince approach. Rameses had never expressed himself upon the Hebrew question, and the scribe knew full well that neither himself nor Har-hat, nor all the ministers, nor heaven and earth could militate against the counsel of that grim young tyrant. Meneptah spoke with much appeal in his voice.

"Rameses, I need thee. Awake out of thy dream and help me. What shall I do with the Hebrews?"

"I have trusted to my father's sufficient wisdom to help him in his strait, without advice of mine," was the indifferent reply.

"Aye; but I crave thy counsel, now, my son."

"Then, neither god nor devil could make me loose my grasp did I wish to hold the Hebrews!"

Hotep sighed, inaudibly, and was moved to depart, had not lack of the king's permission made him stay.

"But consider the losses to my realm," Meneptah made perfunctory protest. The prince's full lip curled.

"This is but a new method of warfare," he answered. "Instead of going forth with thy foot-soldiers and thy chariots, thy javelins and thy shields, thou sufferest siege within thy borders. Wilt thou fling up thy hands and open thy gates to thine enemy, while yet there is plenty within the realm and men to post its walls? Let it not be written down against thee, O my father, that thou didst so. Losses to Egypt!" the phrase was bitter with scorn. "Dost thou remember how many dead the Incomparable Pharaoh left in Asia? How many perished of thirst in the deserts and of cold in the mountains, and of pestilence in the marshes? Ran not the rivers of the Orient with Egyptian blood, and where shall the souls of those empty bodies dwell which rotted under the sun on the great plains of the East? The Incomparable Pharaoh cast out the word 'surrender' from his tongue. Wilt thou restore it and use it first in this short-lived conflict with a mongrel race of shepherds? Nay, if thou dost give over now, it shall not be an injustice to thee if it come to pass that thou shalt bow to a brickmaker as thy sovereign, sacrifice to the Immaterial God and swear by the beard of Abraham!"

Meneptah winced under the acrid reproach of his son.

"It hath ever been mine intent to keep the Hebrews, but I would not act unadvised," he explained apologetically.

"Wherefore, then, these frequent consultations with the wolf from Midian?" was the quick retort. "Thou

art unskilled in the ways of war, my father. The king who would conquer treats not with his enemy. Thou dost risk the respect of thy realm for thee. Strengthen thy fortifications and exhaust the cunning of thy besieger. And if he invade thy lines again with insolence and threats, treat him to the sword or the halter. If thou art a warrior, prove thy deserts to the name. And if Egypt backs thee not in thy stand against the Hebrew, then it is not the same Egypt that followed Rameses the Great to glory!"

The king put up his hand.

"Enough! They shall not go; they shall not go!"

CHAPTER XXXI

THE CONSPIRACY

One morning early in March Seti stood beside the parapet on the palace of the king in Tanis. His eyes were fixed on the shimmering line of the northern level, but he did not see it. Some one came with silent foot-fall and laid a hand on his arm.

He turned and looked into Ta-user's eyes. His face softened and he took the hand between his own.

"Alas! this day thou returnest into the Hak-heb," he said.

She nodded. "Would I could take thee with me, but not yet, not yet. Wait till thou art a little older."

He sighed and looked away again. "What weighty things absorb my prince?" she asked. "What especial labors is he planning?"

His face clouded. "Dost thou mock me, Ta-user?" he returned.

"Hadst thou no thought at all?" she persisted.

"I merely pondered on mine own uselessness," he answered.

"Fie!"

"Nay, even thou must see it. I live on my father's bounty; I accept my people's homage; I adore the gods. I bear no arms; I neither prepare to reign nor expect to serve. I am a thing set above the healthy

labor of the world and below the cares of the exalted. I am nothing."

"Fie! I say."

Seti looked at her reproachfully.

"Thou hast wealth," she began and paused.

"Wherein doth that make me useful?"

"Much can be done with gold. Is there none in need?"

"None who asks has been denied. Yet what right have I to deal alms to them from whom my riches come? If I yielded up everything, to my very cloak, should I have done more than return to them what they have given me? I should still be a penniless prince, more useless than ever." He sat down on the broad lintel capping the parapet, but retained her hand.

"Ta-user," he continued, as she opened her lips to speak, "what wouldst thou have me do?"

"I would have thee be useful."

"I shall throw away my lordly trappings," he said, "and become a lifter of the shadoof * this day."

"Seti," she said sternly, putting his hand away, "with thy people imperiled by the sorcery of a wizard, with thy realm desolated by the plagues of his sending, canst thou, on whom I have built so much, thus lightly consider thy uses and ignore the things set at thy very hand to do?"

The prince looked at her with not a little discomfiture showing on his young face. But the interrogation was emphatic, and she awaited an answer.

"I have no weight with my father," he said soberly.

*Shadoof—a pole with a bucket attached, like the old well-sweep, used by rustics to dip water from the Nile.

"Thou knowest that Egypt will never have peace until the Hebrews depart. But I can not persuade my father to release them and I can not persuade the Israelite to content himself to stay. Thou dost demand much of me if thou dost demand of me the impossible."

As much of contempt as it was wise to show glimmered in her eyes.

"And thou art at thy wits' end?" she asked.

"A little way to go. Help me, Ta-user. Bear with me."

She moved closer to him and absently smoothed down the fine locks, disordered by the wind. Presently she lifted his face and said with sudden impulsiveness:

"Dost, of a truth, believe everything that is told thee?"

"Am I over-credulous?" he asked.

"Thou art. Thou believest this Hebrew to be honest in his show of interest in his people?"

"I can not doubt him, Ta-user. One has but to see him to be convinced."

"One has but to see him to know that he might be coaxed into passiveness with that for which an Israelite would sell his mummy—gold!"

"Nay! Nay!" Seti exclaimed. "Thou dost wrong him! He is the soul of misdirected zeal. His is an earnestness not to be frightened with death nor abated with bribes."

She laughed a cool little laugh.

"Deliver to him but the price he names, and the Israelitish unrest will settle like a swarm of smoked bees."

"Ta-user, it is thou that art deceived," Seti remon-

strated. "Even the Pharaoh does not hesitate to assert that Mesu is terribly upright. Not even he would dream of offering the wizard Hebrew a peace-tribute."

Once again she laughed. "Mind me, I speak reverently of the divine Meneptah, the Shedder of Light, but I do not marvel that he is no more willing to deliver over to Mesu one color of gold than another."

Seti looked at her with a puzzled expression. Gazing down into his eyes, she said with sudden solemnity:

"My Prince, may I give my life into thy hands?"

Impulsively he pressed her hand to his lips.

"The gods overtake me with their vengeance if I guard it not," he exclaimed.

She drew him from his place on the parapet and led him to a seat in a corner near the double towers. There she sat, and he dropped down at her feet. He crossed his arms over her lap and lifted his face to her. For a moment she was silent, contemplating the young countenance. What were the thoughts that came to her then? Did she applaud or rebuke herself? Did she pity or despise him?

Is there more of evil than of good wrought by the mind working silently?

Seti was ripe to be plucked by treachery. His was the faith that is insulted by a suggestion of wariness.

"While I dwelt obscurely in the Hak-heb," she began, "I was much among the partizans of Amonmeses. They are friends of the Pharaoh now, so what I tell is dead sedition. But I heard it when it lived, and thou knowest the penalty invited by him who

listens to criticism of the king. Attend me, then, for the story is short.

"The history of Mesu is an old tale to thee. Thy noble grandsire's first queen, Neferari Thermuthis, adopted the Hebrew, and when she died he shared in the allotment of her treasure. But Mesu was an exile in Midian at the time, and his share was left with Shaemus, then the heir, to be given over to the foster-son when he should return. But Shaemus died, and all thy father's older brothers, so the gracious Meneptah came to wear the crown. To him fell the guardianship of the Hebrew's treasure till what time he should return out of Midian. Mesu hath returned. Hath thy father delivered to him his inheritance?"

Seti's face flamed, but, before he could speak, she went on. "Not so; not one copper weight. It lies untouched in the treasury. Thine august sire does not use it, because he hath wealth more than he can spend. But it is the Hebrew's, and if it were delivered into his hands it would redeem Egypt. I know it. There, it is done. My life is in thy hands."

The prince looked at her with wide eyes, his cheeks flushed, his lips silent.

"Wouldst thou have proof?" she continued recklessly. "Seek out Hotep, who hath been keeper of the records at Pithom and ask him."

"Did he tell thee?" Seti demanded.

"Nay; I learned it from another source, not in the palace." The prince lapsed into silence, his eyes averted. Ta-user regarded him intently. Suddenly he raised his head.

"Dost thou know the amount of his share?" he asked.

"It is but a moderate part of the queen's fortune, since each of the king's children by his many women was included."

Seti winced, for there was something dimly offensive in the calm way she stated the bald fact.

"It is not much, as princely dowers go," she added casually.

"He shall have it," Seti said almost impatiently. "Out of mine own wealth he shall have it—not as a bribe—he would not have it so—but because it is his."

She caught his hands to her breast and cried out in delight.

"And I shall be thy lieutenant, and none shall know of it, save thee and me."

He smiled up at her.

"Nay, there is danger in this," he said gently, "and I would not imperil thee. Already thou hast overstepped safety for Egypt's sake and mine. More than this I will not let thee do."

An expression of panic swept over her face. He interpreted it as hurt.

"Thou hast been my guide for so long, Ta-user. Let me choose this once for thee."

She pouted, and putting him away from her, arose and left him. He followed her and took her hands.

"A confederate thou must have," she complained; "and whom dost thou trust more than Ta-user?"

"It is not a matter of trust," he explained, "but of thine immunity should the Hathors frown upon my plan."

"It matters not," she protested. "Whom wilt thou trust and imperil instead of Ta-user?"

"Thou dost hurry me in my plan-making," he remonstrated mildly. "Mayhap I shall choose Hotep."

She flung up her head, her face the picture of dismay.

"Nay, nay! not Hotep! Of all thy world, not Hotep!" she exclaimed.

He lifted his brows in amazement.

"Surely thou dost not question his fidelity—his power?"

"Nay! but dost thou not guess what he will do? Thou child! Abet thee! Nay! he would set his foot upon thy plan and foil thee at once with his politic hand."

"Hotep will obey as I command; that thou knowest," he said with dignity.

"Thou wilt not reach the point of command with him," she vehemently insisted. "He would catch thine intent ere thou hadst stated it and would make thee aghast at thyself in a twinkling by his smooth reasoning and vivid auguries. Nay, if thou art to have thy way in this, I wash my hands of it. We are as good as undone."

She turned away from him, but he followed her contritely.

"I submit," he said helplessly. "Advise me, but I—nay, ask me not to endanger thee, Ta-user."

She shook her head and moved on. He advanced a step or two after her, stopped, and wheeling about, resumed his place at the parapet.

After a little pause she was beside him again.

"Shall we forego this thing?" she asked.

"Nay," he answered quietly. "I can achieve it with-

out help." She drew a breath as if to speak but held her peace. They stood in silence side by side for a while.

Presently she slipped between him and the parapet.

"Hast thou not called me wise in thy time?" she asked. "I believed thee, then."

"I told thee a truth, but I might have added that thou art over-brave," he said, catching her drift.

"Listen, then, to me. Thou, in thy young credulity, seest in this only justice to an enemy. I, in the wisdom of riper years and the discernment bred of experience with knaves, see in it the redemption of Egypt. If the heaviest penalty overtook us is it not a result worth achieving at any cost? Seti, believe me; grant me my belief! It is the one hope of thy father's kingdom. Shall it fail because thou wast envious for my safety above Egypt's? I can aid thee to success. That thou hast said. If thou failest, though thou dost attempt it alone, dost thou dream that I could see thee punished without crying out, 'It was I who urged him!' If thou art undone, likewise am I. If thou art to succeed, wilt thou selfishly keep thy success to thyself?"

She slipped her arm about his neck and pressed close to him.

"Nay, Seti, thou dost overestimate the peril. The Hebrew will not betray us, and who else will know of it? I shall make a journey into Goshen, find Mesu and bid him meet thee at a certain place. There thou shalt come at a certain time with the treasure, and the feat is done. But if we fail—" she flung her head back and bewitched him with a heavy eye—"will it be hard for me to persuade the king?"

Seti contemplated her with bewilderment in his face.

The youth and innocence in his young soul revolted, but there was another element that yielded and was pleased.

"Have it thy way, Ta-user," he said, with hesitation in his words, while he continued to gaze helplessly into her compelling eyes.

She laughed and kissed him. "I will see thee again soon." Putting him back from her, she descended the stairway.

In the shadow at the foot she came upon two figures, walking close together, the taller of the two bending over the smaller. The pair started apart at sight of the princess.

"A blessing on thy content, Ta-meri," the princess said. "And upon thine, Nechutes."

The cup-bearer bowed and rumbled his appreciation of her courtesy.

"Dost thou leave us, Ta-user?" his wife asked.

"Aye, I return to the Hak-heb. O, I am glad to go. Would I could leave the same quiet here in Tanis that I hope to find in Nehapehu."

"Aye, I would thou couldst. But is it not true, my Princess, that one may make his own content even in the sorriest surroundings?" Nechutes asked.

"For himself, even so. But the very making of one's selfish content may work havoc with the peace of another. That I have seen."

"Aye," Nechutes responded uncomfortably, wondering if the princess meant to confess her disappointment to them.

"It makes me quarrel at the Hathors. The most of us deserve the ills that overtake us. But he—alas—none but the good could sing as he sang!"

The cup-bearer dropped his indifference immediately.

"Ha! Whom dost thou mean?" he demanded.

"Oh!" the princess exclaimed. "Perchance I give thee news."

"If thou meanest Kenkenes, indeed thou dost give us news. What of him? We know that he is dead. Is there anything further?"

"Of a truth, dost thou not know? Nay, then, far be it from me to tell thee—anything." She passed round them and started to go on. In a few paces, Nechutes overtook her.

"Give us thy meaning, Ta-user," he said earnestly. "Kenkenes was near to me—to Ta-meri. What knowest thou?"

"The court buzzes with it. Strange indeed that ye heard it not. It is said, and of a truth well-nigh proved, that the heart of the singer broke when Ta-meri chose thee, Nechutes, and that—that the disaster which befell him may have been sought."

Nechutes seized her arm, and Ta-meri cried out.

"He sent Ta-meri to me," the cup-bearer said wrathfully. "Thy news is—"

"Alas! Nechutes," the princess said sorrowfully, "it was sacrifice. He knew that Ta-meri loved thee and he nobly surrendered, but was the hurt any less because he submitted?"

Nechutes released her and turned away. Ta-meri covered her face with her hands and followed him. He did not pause for her, and she had to hasten her steps to keep up with him. The princess looked after them for a space and went on.

Straight through the corridors toward the royal

apartments she went. Her copper eyes had taken on a luminousness that was visible in the dark. There was an elasticity in her step that spoke of exultation.

The Hathors were indulging her beyond reason.

A soldier of the royal guard paced outside the doorway of the king's apartments. Ta-user flung him a smile and, passing him without a word of leave-asking, smiled again and disappeared through the door.

Meneptah, who sat alone, raised his head from the scroll he was laboriously spelling. If he had meant to resent the intrusion, the impulse died within him at the charming obeisance the princess made.

As she rose at his sign, Har-hat entered. Ta-user came near to the king, smiling triumphantly at the fan-bearer.

"The gods sped my feet," she said, "and I am here first. Hold thy peace, noble Har-hat. Mine is the first audience."

Having reached the king's side, she dropped on her knees and folded her hands on the arm of his chair.

"A boon, O Shedder of Light! So much thou owest me. Behold, I came to thee on the hope of thy promises. What have I won therefrom? Naught save, perchance, the smiles of Egypt at my disappointment."

Meneptah's face flushed.

"Say on, O my kinswoman," he said, moving uncomfortably.

"Kinswoman! And a year agone, I thought to hear, 'O my daughter.'"

The color in the king's face deepened.

"Wilt thou reproach me, Ta-user, for my son's wilfulness?" was his tactless reply.

Ta-user shot an amused glance at the discomfited countenance of Har-hat and went on.

"Nay, O my Sovereign. I do but wish to incline thine ear to me. Say first thou wilt grant me my boon."

He looked at her doubtfully, but she drew nearer and lifted her face to his.

"I do not ask for thy crown, or thy son, or for an army, or treasure, or anything but that which thou wouldst gladly give me, because of thy just and generous heart."

The doubt faded out of his face.

"Thou hast my word, Ta-user."

"And for that I thank thee." She bent her head and touched her lips to the hand lying nearest her.

"Give me ear, then," she continued. "Thou hast among thy ministers a noble genius, the murket, Mentu—"

The king broke in with a dry smile. "Wouldst have him for a mate?"

She shook her head till the emeralds pendent from the fillet on her forehead clinked together. Nothing could have been more childlike than the pleased smile on her face.

"Nay, nay, he would not have me," she protested. "But he hath a son."

Har-hat moved forward a pace. She noted the movement and playfully waved him back. "Encroach not. This hour is mine." Har-hat's face wore a dubious smile.

"He hath a son," she repeated.

"He had a son, but he is dead," the king answered.

"Not so! He is in prison where thy counselor, the wicked, unfeeling, jealous, rapacious Har-hat hath entombed him!"

Har-hat sprang forward as the king lifted an amazed and angry face.

"Back!" she cried, motioning at him with her full arm. "It is time the Hathors overtook thee, thou ineffable knave!"

"I protest!" the fan-bearer cried, losing his temper.

"Enough of this play," Meneptah said sternly. "Go on with thy tale, Ta-user. I would know the truth of this."

"Thou wilt not learn it from the princess," Har-hat exclaimed.

"Ah!" Ta-user ejaculated, a world of innocence, surprise and wounded feeling in the word.

"Thy words do not become thee, Har-hat," Meneptah said. The fan-bearer closed his lips and gazed fixedly at the princess.

She drooped her head and went on in a voice low with hurt.

"The gods judge me if my every word is not true! Har-hat imprisoned him because the gallant young man loved the maiden whom Har-hat would have taken for his harem."

Meneptah's face blazed. "Go on," he said sharply.

"The fan-bearer had some little right on his side, for the young man had committed sacrilege in carving a statue, and had stolen the maiden away and hidden her when Har-hat would have taken her. The maiden is an Israelite, and her hiding-place is known to this day

only by herself and her unhappy lover. Now comes thy villainy, O thou short of temper," she continued, looking at the fan-bearer.

"Thy father, O Shedder of Light, the Incomparable Pharaoh who reigns in Osiris, gave Mentu a signet—"

The king interrupted. "I know of that. Go on."

"When Kenkenes was overtaken and thrust into prison he sent this signet to thee, O my Sovereign, with a petition for his release and for the maiden's freedom. The writing and the signet came into Har-hat's hands and he ignored them, though the signet commanded him in the name of the holy One." Her voice lowered with awe and dismay at his unregeneracy. "Kenkenes is still in prison."

"Now, by the gods, Har-hat!" Meneptah exclaimed angrily. "I would not have dreamed such baseness in thee!"

The fan-bearer was stupefied with wrath and astonishment. Words absolutely refused to come to him. Ta-user accused him with the wide eyes of fearless righteousness. Presently she went on:

"Already hath he languished eight months in prison. His offense against the gods and against the laws of the land hath been expiated. I would have thee set him free now, O Meneptah, that he may return to his love and comfort her."

Meneptah reached for the reed pen.

"Hold!" cried Har-hat.

"Thou dost forget thyself, good Har-hat," the princess said with dignity. "Thou speakest with thy sovereign."

"But I will be heard!" he exclaimed violently. "Hear me! I pray thee, Son of Ptah!"

Meneptah removed the wetted pen and waited.

"Thou didst give the maiden to me thyself!" he began precipitately. "Thy document of gift I have yet. He stole her, hid her away, committed sacrilege and abused two of my servants nigh unto death when they sought for her. Hath he any more right to her than I? Art thou assured that he hath an honorable purpose in mind for her? She is comely and well instructed in service, and I would have put her in my daughter's train, even as the Hebrew Miriam was lady-in-waiting to Neferari Thermuthis. If thou dost examine the records of the petitions to thee thou wilt find that I asked her expressly for household service. It is false that I had any other purpose in mind.

"As to the signet," he continued breathlessly, "there is no word upon it concerning the palliation of a triple crime! Shall we invoke the king in the blameless name of the holy One, and demand forgiveness in the name of Him who forgiveth no sin? Furthermore, thou didst give the writing into my hands, and in obedience to thy command, I acted as I thought best. My purposes have been wilfully distorted!"

Meneptah frowned with perplexity. But while he pondered, Ta-user drew near to him and said to him very softly:

"If his words be true, O my Sovereign, one lovely Israelite is as serviceable as another. The young man loves this maiden. Doubt it not! He is a worthy offspring of that noble sire, Mentu. If he offended, he hath suffered sufficiently. Let him go, I pray thee."

"It is my word against her surmises, O Meneptah," Har-hat insisted.

The king frowned more and stroked his cheek.

"Thine anger should be abated by this time, Har-hat," he said feebly.

"His rebellion is not yet broken. I have not the slave yet," the fan-bearer retorted.

"Mayhap he is ready to surrender her now."

"Not so!" the princess put in. "He hath endured eight months. If it were eight hundred years his silence would be the same. It is proof of my boast that he loves her. No man who would comfort his flesh alone would suffer such lengths of mortification of flesh! Let him go, my King, and give the clean-souled fan-bearer another Israelite for his daughter."

"Why camest thou not sooner with this to the king?" Har-hat demanded.

"I have but this moment learned of it, and I could not leave the court without one last act for the good of the oppressed," she replied.

"Have it thy way, Ta-user. Come to me in an hour," Meneptah began.

"Nay, write it now."

"Thou art insistent."

"Thou didst promise," she whispered, her face so close to his that the light from the facets of her emeralds turned on his cheek.

He took up his pen and wrote.

"Now promise that the signet shall go back to Mentu," she continued.

"As thou wilt, Ta-user," the king replied.

She caught up the roll, hesitated for a moment, and then kissed his cheek deliberately and was gone.

A moment later Har-hat overtook her in the hall.

"Hyena!" he exclaimed. "What is thy game?"

She laughed and shook the scroll in his face.

"It is my turn at the pawns now. Thou didst play between me and the crown. Now I shall harass thee for the joy of it. Thinkest thou I cared aught for the dreamer and his loves? Bah! I heard this tale eight months agone while I had naught to do but eavesdrop. Nay, it was but my one chance to vex thee."

Again she laughed and ran away to the queen's apartments.

"I am come to bid thee farewell," she said, kneeling before the pale little woman who loved the king. The princess put up her face to be kissed.

"Not my lips!" she cried warningly. "They yet tingle with the kiss of Meneptah, thy husband. I would not have the ecstasy spoiled by another's touch."

The queen flushed and kissed the cheek.

"Farewell, and peace go with thee," she said quietly.

The princess retained her composure until she re-entered the hall. There she flung her arms above her head and laughed silently.

"Of a truth, I take peace with me, and I leave discord behind!"

CHAPTER XXXII

RACHEL'S REFUGE

Rachel stood by the parapet on the top of the Memphian house of Har-hat. About her were no evidences of her former serfdom. She wore an ample robe of white linen, with blue selvages heavily fringed. About her neck was the collar of gold. The costume was distinctly Israelitish, elaborated somewhat at the suggestion of Masanath, to whom Rachel's golden beauty was a never-lessening wonder. Compared to the tiny gorgeous lady, Rachel was as a tall lily to a mimosa.

Masanath was comfortably pillowed on cushions, close to the Israelite. The rose-leaf flush on her little face was subdued and her dark eyes were larger than usual. The physical discomforts of the plagues had overtaken her; and Rachel, the only one of all the household who had passed unscathed through the troublous time, had been so tender a nurse that Masanath recovered with reluctance.

This was the Egyptian's first day on the housetop, and she was not happy. The great pots of glazed earthenware, each a small garden in size, were filled with baked earth. The locusts had taken her flowers. In the park below the grass was gone and the palm trees were shadowless. Her chariot horses had died in the stables; her pets had drooped and perished; her birds were missing one morning, and Rachel said they

had flown to Goshen, where there were grain and grasses. Furthermore, the year of freedom had almost expired and she began to anticipate sorrowfully.

The period of the Israelite's residence with Masanath had been uneventful save for those grim, momentous days of plague and loss. Deborah had survived the removal to comfort in Memphis only a month. The brutal injuries inflicted by the servants of Har-hat had been too severe for her age-enfeebled frame to repair. So she died, blessing the two young girls who had attended her, and promising peace and happiness to come. Then they laid her in a new tomb cut in the rock face of the Libyan hills and wrote on her sarcophagus:

"She departed out of the land of Mizraim before her people."

And this was prophecy.

Thus was Rachel left, but for Masanath, entirely alone. None of the afflictions had overtaken her. A mysterious Providence shielded her. Anubis, which she formally claimed as hers, was the only one of the numerous dumb dwellers in the fan-bearer's house that had escaped. And of him there is something to be told.

Shortly after the arrival of the Israelites in Memphis, Anubis disappeared for days.

"He is gone to visit the murket," Masanath explained.

One noon Rachel, resting on the housetop with her hostess, saw him leisurely returning, by starts of interest and recollection. Behind him, walking cautiously, was a man.

"Anubis returneth," Rachel said, sitting up.

Masanath raised herself and looked.

"Imhotep* plagues mine eyes, or that is the murket following him," she exclaimed.

Immediately Rachel began to tremble and, sinking back on her cushions, hid her face. Masanath continued to watch the approaching man.

"If he comes shall I send for thee?" she asked in a half-whisper.

The Israelite shook her head. "Only if he asks for me," she answered.

"A pest on the creature!" Masanath exclaimed impatiently after a little silence. "He is torturing the man! Hath he forgot the place?"

She leaned over the parapet and called the ape. The murket looked up.

"Anubis is my guest, noble Mentu," she replied. "Wilt thou not come up with him?"

The murket looked at her a moment before he answered.

"Nay, I thank thee, my Lady. I left the noonday meal that I might be led at the creature's will. He is restless since my son is gone."

Every word of the murket's fell plainly on Rachel's ears. The tones were those of Kenkenes, grown older. The statement came to her as a call upon her knowledge of the young artist's whereabouts.

"Tell him—tell him—" she whispered desperately.

"What?" asked Masanath, turning about.

"Tell him where Kenkenes went!"

The Egyptian leaned over the parapet. "Fie! he is

*Imhotep—The physician-god.

gone!" she said. "Nay, but I shall catch him;" and flying down through the house, out into the narrow passage, she overtook the murket.

This is what she told Rachel when she returned:

"I said to him: 'My Lord, I know where Kenkenes went.' And he said: 'Of a truth?' in the calmest way. 'Aye,' said I. 'It hath come to mine ears that he went to Tape.' 'That have I known for long,' he answered, after he had looked at me till I wished I were away. 'That have I known for long, and why he went and why he came not back,' and having said, he smoothed my hair and told me I was not much like my father, and departed without another word. To my mind he hath conducted himself most strangely. I doubt not he knows more than you or I, Rachel."

To Masanath's dismay the Israelite flung herself face down on the rugs and wept. "He is not dead; he is not dead," she cried.

The collapse of a composure so strong and bridled filled Masanath with consternation. Had Rachel's spirit been of weaker fiber the Egyptian's own forceful individuality would have longed to sustain it, but when it broke in its strength she knew that here was a stress of emotion too deep for her to soothe.

"Then if he is not dead," she said, searching for something to say, "why weepest thou?"

"Alas! seest thou not, Masanath? He hath not returned to me; his father knows his story, and if he be not dead how shall I explain his absence save that he hath forgotten or repented?"

"Not so!" Masanath declared. "He is the soul of honor, and there is a mystery in this that the gods may explain in time. Comfort thee, Rachel, for there stir-

reth a hope in me." Then with the utmost tact she told the story of the finding of Kenkenes' boat and the theory accepted in Memphis.

"I can offer thee hope," she concluded, "but I can not even guess what should keep him so long. Of this be assured, however, he did not desert thee, Rachel."

Enigmatical as it was, the incident was comforting to Rachel.

So the Nile rose and subsided, the winter came and went, and now it was near the middle of March. Masanath forgot Kenkenes and remembered her own sorrow now that its consummation was surely approaching. During the hours that darkened gradually Rachel was to her an ever-responsive comforter. Even in the dead of night, if the weight of her care burdened her dreams so that she stirred or murmured, she was instantly soothed till she slept again. Usually the day did not harass her with oppression, but if she grew suddenly afraid, Rachel was at her side to comfort her—never urging, either to rebellion or submission, but ever offering hope.

So the little Egyptian came to love the Israelite with the love that demands rather than gives—the love of a child for the mother, of the benefited for the benefactor. Gradually Rachel lost sight of her own trouble in her devotion to Masanath. She had no time for her own thoughts. Each passing day brought the Egyptian's martyrdom nearer, and Rachel's uses hourly increased.

This day Masanath, who had been ill, was unusually downcast.

"It may be," she said with more cheer in her tones

than had been in her previous remarks, "that I shall die before they can wed me to Rameses."

"Nay, why not say that the Lord God will interfere before that time?"

"Evil and power have joined hands against me, and even the gods are helpless against such collusion," Masanath answered drearily.

"The sorrows of Egypt are not yet at an end; mayhap the hand of the God of Israel will overtake the prince."

"Thy God is afflicting, not helping; He will not spare me."

"The hand of the Lord is lifted against Egypt. Will He bless the land, then, with such a queen as thou wouldst be?"

"Nay, but thine is a strange God! Mark thou, I doubt Him not! But ai! I should face Him for ever in sackcloth and ashes lest He smite me for smiling and living my life without care."

"Hath an ill befallen Israel?"

"If thou art Israel, nay! Thou hast flourished in this dread time like a palm by a deep well."

"So he prospereth all his chosen."

Masanath shook her head and looked away. From the stairway Nari approached.

"Unas hath come from Tanis, my Lady," she said with suppressed excitement. Masanath sat up, trembling.

"Isis grant he hath not come to take thee to marriage," the waiting woman breathed. Rachel laid an inquiring hand on the little Egyptian's arm.

"My father's courier," she explained. "Let him come

up," she continued to Nari. The waiting woman bowed and left her.

Rachel arose and took a place on the farther side of the hypostyle, with the screens of matting between her and Masanath. She was still in hiding.

The fat servitor came up presently.

"The gracious gods have had thee under their sheltering wings during these troublous times," he said, bowing. "It is worth the trip from Tanis to look upon thee."

"Thy words are fair, Unas. How is it with my father?" Masanath asked with stiff lips.

"The gods are good to the Pharaoh. They permit the wise Har-hat to continue in health to render service to his sovereign."

Masanath, dreading the news, asked after it at once. Men have killed themselves for fear of death.

"Thou hast come to conduct me to court?"

"That is the gracious will of my master."

Masanath half rose from her seat. "When?" she asked almost inaudibly.

"In twenty days; no more. I have a mission to perform and shall go hence immediately. But I shall return in twenty days, never fear, my Lady."

Masanath saw that he mocked her. Her wrath was an effective counter-irritant for her trouble. She was calm again.

"Then, if thy message is delivered, go!"

He backed out and descended the stairway.

When she was sure he was gone she flung herself, in a paroxysm of wild grief and despair, face down on her cushions. At that moment a cold hand caught her arm. She looked up and saw Rachel. All the blue had

gone from the Israelite's eyes, leaving them black with dreadful conviction. The color had receded from her cheeks and her figure was rigid.

"Who was that man?" she demanded in a voice low with concentrated emotion.

"Unas, my father's man. What is amiss, Rachel?"

The Israelite stood for a moment as though she permitted the intelligence to assemble all the further facts that it entailed. Then she turned away and walked swiftly toward the well of the stair.

"Rachel! Thou—what—thou hast not answered me!" Masanath called.

"There is naught to be said. I—it were best that I go to my people now, since thou goest to marriage," was the unready reply.

"Thou wilt return to thy people! Rachel! Nay, nay! Thou art all I have. Come back! Come back!" Masanath cried, running after her.

Rachel hesitated, trembling with a multitude of emotions.

"It were better I should go," she insisted, trying to escape Masanath's clasp. "If I go now I can reach my people and be hidden safely."

The little Egyptian flung herself upon the Israelite, weeping.

"Art thou, too, deserting me—thou, who art the last to befriend me? What have I done that thou shouldst desert me?"

"Naught! Naught! Thou dear unfortunate!" was the passionate reply. "But I must go! I must!"

"Thou must flee from sure safety to only possible security!" Masanath demanded through her tears. "If I must wed this terrible prince, I shall put my misery

to some use. I shall ask thy liberty at his hands and thou shalt live with me for ever, my one comfort, my one support."

"But Israel departeth shortly—"

"Thou shalt not go," Masanath declared hysterically. "I will not suffer thee! The doors shall be barred against thy departure!"

Rachel turned her head away and pushed back her hair. Her plight was desperate. Meanwhile Masanath went on.

"It is not like thee, Rachel, to desert me! I had not dreamed thee so selfish—so cruel!"

"Sister!" Rachel cried, "thou torturest me!" On a sudden Masanath raised her head and gazed at the Israelite.

"What possessed thee to go?" she demanded. "Is it Rameses who hath beset thee?"

Rachel shook her head and avoided Masanath's eye.

"Tell me," the Egyptian insisted. "There is mystery in this. What had my father's man to do with thy hasty resolution to depart?"

There was no answer. Masanath put the Israelite back from her a little and repeated her question.

"I can not tell thee," Rachel responded slowly.

Silence fell, and Masanath spoke at last, in a decided voice.

"Thou art within my house, and so under my command. Thou shalt not leave me! I have said!" She turned to go back to her cushions. Rachel followed her.

"I pray thee, Masanath—"

"Hold thy peace. Let us have no more of this."

Rachel grew paler, and she clasped her hands as though praying for fortitude. At last she broke out:

"Masanath! Masanath! That man—that Unas—attended the noble who halted me on the road to the Nile, that morning; he was the one sent back to Memphis for the document of gift; he pursued me into the hills. He is the servant of the man who follows me!"

The Egyptian recoiled as though she had been struck.

"Nay, nay," she cried, throwing up her hands as though to ward off the conviction. "Not my father! Not he! Thou art wrong, Rachel!"

"Would to the Lord God that I were, my sister! But I am not mistaken in that face. He was the one that disputed with Kenkenes—was the one Kenkenes choked. Never was there another man with such a voice, such a face, such a figure! It is he!"

Masanath wrung her hands.

"Tell it over again. Describe the noble to me."

"He was third in the procession and drove black horses—"

"Holy Mother Isis! his horses were black. The first two would have been the princes of the realm, the next the fan-bearer. Nay, I dare not hope that it is not true. Since he would barter his own daughter for a high place, he would not hesitate to take by force the daughter of another. O Mother of Sorrows, hide me! my father! my father!" she wailed.

Under the combined weight of her griefs, she dropped on the carpeted pavement and wept without control. All of Rachel's fear and horror were swept away in a wave of compunction and pity. She lifted the little Egyptian back upon her cushions again and, kneeling beside her, took the bowed head against her

heart. Her hair fell forward and framed the two sorrowing faces in a shower of gold.

"Lo! I have been a guest under thy roof and at thy board, a pensioner upon thy cheer, and now, even while my heart was full of gratitude, have I encroached upon thy happiness and broken thine overburdened heart. Forgive me, Masanath. Let me not come between thee and thy father, sister! Let me return to my people, for Israel shortly goeth forth. Doubt it not. Then shall I be out of his reach, and the Lord will not lay up the sin against him. Furthermore, dost thou not remember Deborah's words while the spirit of prophecy was upon her? Promised she not peace for us, and happiness and long tranquillity to follow these days of sorrow? Do thou have faith, Masanath. Cease not to hope, for the forces of evil have never yet triumphed wholly."

"Nay, but how shall that restore my pride in my father?" Masanath sobbed. "How shall I ever think of him without the bitterness of shame? What must the world think of him—of me? Now I know what the murket meant. He knew, and Kenkenes knew and all— Alas! alas!" she broke forth in fresh grief, "and Hotep knows!"

Rachel could say no more, for in this sorrow no comfort could avail.

She stroked the little Egyptian's hair and let the wounded heart soothe itself.

Presently Masanath's mind wandered from the new villainy of her father to the memory of the older offense and she wept afresh.

"If thou goest, Rachel, there is none left to comfort me," she mourned. "I am alone—desolate, and the

powers of Egypt are arrayed against me!" Rachel was hearing her own plight given expression. She put aside any thought of herself and applied herself to Masanath's need.

"Nay, there is Hotep," she whispered. "He loves thee, and if there is aught in prophecy, he will comfort thee when I am gone."

"But thou shalt not go," Masanath cried. "Stay with me, Rachel."

"Thy father's servant returneth in twenty days. As I have said, if I go now, I can reach my people and be hidden safely."

The Egyptian held fast to the Israelite and wept.

"Nay, Rachel. Stay with me. Thou art all I have!"

Rachel turned her head and gazed toward the south. Across the housetops, the far-off sickle of the Nile curved into a crevice between the hills and disappeared. Somewhere beyond that blue and broken sky-line her last claim to Egypt had been lost. Why should she stay when Kenkenes was gone? Meanwhile Masanath went on pleading.

If she departed, the next day's sun might dawn upon him in Memphis, searching and sorrowing because he found her not. The hour of separation might be delayed for twenty days—in that time he might come.

"I will stay till my people go—if they depart within twenty days," Rachel made answer. "But I must be gone ere thy father's servant returns."

Masanath rebelled, sobbing.

"Nay, weep not. The hour is distant. In that time, since these are days of miracles, thy sorrows and mine may have faded like a mist. Come, no more. Let us bide the workings of the good God."

CHAPTER XXXIII

BACK TO MEMPHIS

The valley in which Thebes Diospolis was situated was wide and the overflow of the Nile did not reach the arable uplands near the Arabian hills. Three thousand years before, Menes had established a system of irrigation which had added hundreds of square miles to the agricultural area of Egypt, and every monarch after him had unfailingly preserved the institution. From Syene to Pelusium the country was ramified with canals, and vast sums and great labor were expended yearly upon their keeping.

Since the work was heavy and the demand for it constant, it became a punitive part of each nome's administration. Therefore, the convicts whose misdeeds were too serious to be punished adequately by the bastinado or the fine, and yet not grave enough to merit a sentence to the quarries or the mines, were sent to the canals.

So here in the canals of the eastern Thebaid, was Kenkenes, a prisoner known only by a number. His fellows were unjust public weighers, usurers, rioters, habitual tax-evaders, broken debtors, forgers and housebreakers.

The season of toil had been unusually severe. The native convicts had more to endure than the lash, the

bitter fare, the terrible sun by day, and a bed of dust by night, for the afflictions that befell all Egypt were theirs also. The strange prisoner among them suffered these things and had further the drawback of his own physical strength to combat. The plagues overcame the weaker convicts and decimated the number of laborers, so Kenkenes was put, alone, to the work that two men had done before.

However, the accumulation of toil came upon him gradually and his supple frame toughened as the demand upon it increased. Nor was he sensible of pain or great weariness, for his mind was far away from the sun-heated desert of the eastern Thebaid. He spoke seldom, and held himself aloof from his fellow prisoners. He regarded his taskmasters as if they were written authority no more animate than wafered scrolls of papyrus. No one doubted from the beginning that he was high-born, and this mark of a great fall might have exposed him to abuse; but his great strength and unusual deportment did not invite mistreatment. In short, he was looked upon as mildly mad.

When Kenkenes had rejected the gods, hope, sundered from faith, groped wildly and desperately. In his rare moments of cheer he could not anticipate freedom without trusting to something, and in his misanthropy his doubt had placed no limit on its scope, questioning the honor of king or slave. In these better moments he wanted to believe in something.

So constantly had his sorrows attended him that he had come to dread the night, when there was neither event nor labor to interrupt their dominance over his mind. He caught eagerly at any less troublous prob-

lem that might suggest itself, for he felt that he had been conquered by his plight.

As he lay by night, apart from the rest of the prisoners, he gazed at one glittering star that stood in the north. About it were scintillating clusters, single stars and faint streaks of never-dissipated mists. Night after night that one brilliant point had remained unmoved in its steady gaze from the uppermost, but the clusters rotated about it; the single stars were westward moving; the mists shifted. And a question began to trouble him: What hand had marshaled the stars? Seb,* whom Toth had supplanted? Osiris, whom Set destroyed? The young man put them aside. They were feeble. Nothing so weak had created the mighty hosts of heaven. So he began to weigh the question.

What hand had marshaled the stars? An accident? Since man must worship something supernal, what more tremendous than the cataclysm, if such it were, that evolved the stars. Had the same or a series of such events brought forth the earth and man? Was the accident continuously attendant? Did it spread the Nile over Egypt and call it again within its banks every year? Did it clothe the fields and bring them to harvest every revolution of the sun? Did it hang the moon like a sickle in the west or lift it over the Arabian hills like a bubble of silver every eight and twenty days?

If it were omnipotent, infinite and omnipresent, could it be an accident? If it were, why not worship it and call it God?

*Seb—The Egyptian Chronos.

The reasoning led him again in the direction of the gods, but he saw no reason for a multiplicity of deities. Each member of the Egyptian Pantheon presided over some special field of human interest or human environment. To him, who had lived next to nature till her study had become a worship, there were no flaws in her chronology, no shortcomings or plethora. The earth responded to the skies; the waters were in harmony with the earth, the harvests with all. There was unity in the control over the universe and the hand that was powerful enough to swing the moon was mighty enough to flood the Nile, was tender enough to nourish the harvests, was wise enough to govern men. Where, then, was any need of a superfluity of powers?

But behold, something had thrust a dread hand between the tender ministrations of this other Thing and the benefits to men. By this time it had reached the remotenesses of Egypt that it was the God of the Hebrews. The young man arrived at this alternative in his reasoning: There was a minister of good and another of evil—two powers presiding over the earth,—or,—the sole minister was offended and had deserted its charge, or had loosed upon Egypt the evil at its command. Here Kenkenes paused. He could not arrive at any conclusion on the matter or convince himself that he had not reasoned well.

Night after night, he fell asleep upon his ponderings, but they returned to him with fresh food for thought after every sunset. The reconstruction of something worshipful was more fascinating than had been the demolition of the gods. It took many a night's meditation for the evolution of any fixed idea

from the bewildering convection of thought. And at last he had concluded only that there was one thing—Power—Purpose, which was greater than man.

This was not a great achievement. He had simply permitted the universal, indefinable claim to piety, inherent in every reasoning thing, to assert itself.

Great and sincere and beyond expression was his amazement and his joy when a taskmaster called him from the canal-bed one day and informed him that he was free.

The order was shown him at his request, and the name of the Princess Ta-user as his champion filled him with puzzlement. State news filtered slowly down even to the level he had occupied for the past eight months. He had heard that it was Masanath whom the Hathors had destined to wear the crown of queen to Rameses; the convicts had known of the supremacy of Har-hat. He could not understand how it came that Ta-user, lately discarded, could prevail upon the crown prince to persuade Meneptah, or could herself persuade the king to the overthrow of the fan-bearer's wishes in the matter. Furthermore, why should the princess have taken up his cause? But he did not tarry while he pondered.

His raiment and his money, conscientiously preserved for him by the authorities, had been sent to him, and a little way outside the camp he stepped from the lowest to his rightful rank, swifter than he had descended from it. Covering his sun-burnt shoulders with his robes, assuming the circlet once again, he went toward the distant city of Thebes, once more in spirit and dress the son of the royal murket.

At the heavy-walled prison across the Nile he asked

after the signet. It had not been returned with the writing. Neither was there any word to him concerning his prayer to Pharaoh for the liberty of Rachel. It began to dawn on him that he had been released only after he had been sufficiently punished; that he had failed in the most vital aims of his mission; that the signet, having been found, seemed now to be lost irretrievably. For a space his relief at his freedom was overshadowed by chagrin, but after a little he recovered himself. "At least I am free to care for her, now," he reflected.

Just as he emerged from the imposing doorway of the house of the governor of police, he was jostled by a half-grown boy. To Kenkenes, it seemed that the youth had been on the point of entering, but instead he apologized inaudibly and walked away.

A great rush of impatience, suspense, eagerness and heart-hunger fell on the young artist the instant he knew his footsteps were turned toward Memphis and Rachel. The six days that must intervene between the present time and the moment he entered the old capital seemed insufferable. Never did a lover so fume against the inexorable deliberation of time and the obstinate length of distance. The preliminaries to departure seemed to accumulate and lengthen—and lessen in importance. Haste consumed him. Under a momentary impulse, with all seriousness he began to consider his own fleetness of foot as more expedient than travel by boat. But he put the thought aside, and summoning as much patience as was possible, set about with all speed preparing to depart.

Thebes had not awakened from the coma of horror into which it had lapsed during the great plagues. It

was Kenkenes' first visit to the city since he had left it for the desert, eight months before. Now, the change in the great capital of the south impressed itself upon him, in spite of his haste and his all-absorbing thought of Memphis. The activities of life seemed to be suspended. The call to prayers could be heard hourly from the great gongs of the temple at Karnak, when in happier days the sound had been lost in the city's noises within the very shadow of the pylons. He could hear strains of music in religious processions, when the wind was fair, but he missed the acclaim of the populace. Besides these sounds, silence had settled over Thebes. Booths were closed in many instances; the streets, which ordinarily were quiet, were now deserted; there were no carpets swinging from balconies and housetops, and the citizens he saw were sober of countenance and of garb. So few, indeed, he met, that he noted each passer-by as an event. Once, some distance away from him, he saw again the youth whom he had met in the doorway of the prison.

At a caterer's he purchased supplies for a day's journey and looked about him for a carrier. Catching the boy's eye, he beckoned him, but the youth turned on his heel and disappeared. The son of the merchant offering himself, Kenkenes continued rapidly toward the river where he engaged a vessel to take him to Memphis.

He roused the boatmen into immediate activity by promises of reward for every mile gained over the average day's journey. Their passenger and cargo shipped, the men fell to their oars and the craft shot out of the still waters by the landings into midstream and turned toward the north.

As they cleared, the private passage boat belonging to a nobleman swept up near to them and crossing their track took the same direction several hundred yards nearer the Libyan shore. Kenkenes noted that it was a bari of elegant pattern, deep draft and more numerously manned than his. He noted further that one of the boat's crew was the youth he had met thrice in a short space at Thebes.

"Small wonder that he was not willing to serve me," he commented to himself.

If he observed the companion boat during the next five days it was to remark that since his own vessel kept sturdily alongside one of superior rowing force his men were of a surety earning the promised reward. When they entered the long straight stretches of the Middle country the elegant stranger dropped behind and attended Kenkenes and his crew more distantly thereafter.

Except for these few occasions, Kenkenes had no thought of his surroundings. He stood in the prow and looked down the shimmering width of river, in the direction his heart had taken long before him. And when the white cliffs that proved him close to Memphis came shouldering up from the northern horizon, he had forgotten the stranger in the eager, trembling anticipations that possessed him.

CHAPTER XXXIV

NIGHT

On the morning of the eighteenth day, immediately after sunrise, Rachel came to the curtains over Masanath's door, and put them aside.

Within, she saw her hostess yet in her bed-gown, her hair disordered and her tiny feet bare. She stood before a shrine of silver, the statue of Isis in turquoise displayed therein, and an offering of pressed dates before it. But there was no sign of devotion or humility in the attitude of the Egyptian. One plump arm was stretched toward the image and the hand was tightly clenched. Neither was there any reverence in her voice.

Rachel dropped the curtain and waited. The words came distinctly through the linen hangings.

"Thou false one!* thou ingrate! Is it for this that every day I have sent two fat ducks to the altar in thy name? Is it that I must be separated from my beloved and wedded to the man I hate, that I have prayed to thee day and night? Who hath been more faithful to thee and whom hast thou served more cruelly? Mark thou! If thou darest to cause this thing to come to pass, night nor day shall I rest until I have found

*It was not uncommon for Egyptians to threaten their gods.

the bones of Osiris and scattered them to the four winds of heaven! So carefully shall I hide them, so widely shall I scatter them, that no help of Nepthys, Toth or Anubis shall let thee gather them up again! Aye, I will do it, though I die in the doing and remain unburied, I swear by Set! Remember thou!"

Rachel went softly away.

After a time she returned. She had covered her white dress with a mantle of brown linen and over her head she wore a wimple of the same material. Her hair had been coiled and secured with a bodkin. When she put her hand under the wimple and drew it across her mouth, only her fair skin and blue eyes distinguished her from any other Egyptian lady dressed for a long journey.

She lifted the curtains and entered, and it was long before she came forth again. Then her eyes were hidden and her head bowed, for she had bidden farewell to Masanath. She was returning to Goshen.

In the street before the house she entered her litter and with Pepi walking beside her went to the Nile. And there they were joined by Anubis. He had been absent for days, so his greeting was extravagant, his loyalty inalienable. He entered the bari Pepi had loaded with Rachel's belongings, and would not be coaxed or menaced into disembarking.

"Nay, let him come," Rachel said at last. "Thou canst set him on the shore opposite the tomb. He will leave us willingly there."

So they pushed away.

Rachel wrapped her wimple about her face and removed it once only to gaze at the quarries of Masaarah. They were deserted. Months before, di-

rectly after the affliction of the Nile, the Israelites had been returned to Goshen.

After the bari had passed below the stone wharf, Rachel covered herself and neither spoke nor moved. Her heart was heavy beyond words.

Pepi broke the silence once.

"Shall we drop the ape first, my Lady?"

Rachel shook her head. Anubis was her last hold on Kenkenes.

At the Marsh of the Discontented Soul, the bari nosed among the reeds and grounded gently. Rachel stood for a moment gazing sadly across the stretch of sand toward the abrupt wall against which it terminated inland. Pepi, already on shore, reached a patient hand toward her and awaited her awakening. Anubis landed with a bound and made in a series of wide circles for the cliff. His escape aroused Rachel and she stepped out of the boat. After a moment's thought, she bade Pepi pull away from the shore and await her at a safe distance.

"I shall stay no longer than to write my whereabouts on the tomb, but thy boat here may attract the attention of others on the river, and hereafter they might ask what thou didst in this place. And I am not afraid."

The slow Egyptian obeyed reluctantly, shaking his head as he stood away from shore.

With a sigh that was almost a sob, Rachel walked back over the sand toward the cave that had been her only shelter once.

She did not fear it. Kenkenes had crossed this gray level of sand in the night and its wet border at the

river had borne the print of his sandal. He had made the tomb a home for her, he had knelt on its rock pavement and kissed her hands in its dusk and had passed its threshold, like a shadow, to return no more. And here, too, was the other faithful suggestion of her lost love—the pet ape. How his fitful fidelities had directed themselves to her! She caught him up as he passed her. He struggled, turned in her arms, and then became passive, breathing loudly.

She climbed the rough steps and sat down on the topmost one to think.

She was surrounded with old evidences of her sorrow. Nor was there any cheer before her. Escape was in prospect, but it was liberty without light or peace—a gray freedom without hope, purpose or fruit. Her retrospect gradually brightened, never to brilliance but to a soft luminance, brightest at the farthermost point and sad like the dying daylight. She summarized her griefs—danger, death, suspense, shame and long hopelessness. The lonely girl's stock of unhappiness took her breath away and she pushed back the wimple as if to clear away the oppression.

Anubis realized his moment of freedom was short and with an instant bound he was out and gone.

In no little dismay Rachel started in pursuit, but she had not moved ten paces from the bottom of the steps before she paused, transfixed.

An Egyptian, not Pepi, was hauling a boat into the reeds. The craft secure, he turned up the slant, walking rapidly.

There was no mistaking that commanding stature. Anubis descended on him like an arrow. The

man saw the ape, halted a fraction of an instant, caught sight of Rachel, and with a cry, his arms flung wide, broke into a run toward her.

The ape bounded for his shoulder, but missed and alighted at one side, chattering raucously. The running man did not pause.

The world revolved slowly about Rachel, and the sustaining structure of her frame seemed to lose its rigidity. She put out her hands, blindly, and they were caught and clasped about Kenkenes' neck. And there in the strong support of his tightening arms, her face hidden against the leaping heart, all time and matters of the world drifted away. In their place was only a vast content, featureless and full of soft dusk and warmth.

Gone were all the demure resolutions, the memory of faith or unfaith. Nothing was patent to her except that this was the man she loved and he had returned from the dead.

Presently she became vaguely aware that he was speaking. Though a little unsteady and subdued, it was the same melody of voice that she seemed to have known from the cradle.

"Rachel! Rachel!" he was saying, "why didst thou not go to my father as I bade thee? Nay, I do not chide thee. The joy of finding thee hath healed me of the wrench when I found thee not, at my father's house, at dawn to-day. But tell me. Why didst thou not go?"

"I—I feared—" she faltered after a silence.

"My father? Nay, now, dost thou fear me? Not so; and my father is but myself, grown old. He was only a little less mad with fear than I, when he discovered that thou shouldst have come to him so long ago,

and camest not. It damped his joy in having me again, and I left him pale with concern. Did I not tell thee how good he is?"

"Aye, it was not that I feared him, but that I feared that thou—" And she paused and again he helped her.

"That I was dead? That I had played thee false? Rachel! But how couldst thou know? Forgive me. Since the tenth night I left thee I have been in prison."

"In prison!" she exclaimed, lifting her face. "Alas, that I did not think of it. It is mine to beg thy forgiveness, Kenkenes, and on my very knees!"

"So thou didst think it, in truth!" She hid her face again and craved his pardon.

But he pressed her to him and soothed her.

"Nay, I do not chide thee. Had I been in thy place, I might have thought the same. But it is past—gone with the horrors of this horrible season—Osiris be thanked!"

"Thanks be to the God of Israel," she demanded from her shelter.

"And the God of Israel," he said obediently.

"Nay, to the God of Israel alone," she insisted, raising her head.

He laughed a little and patted her hands softly together.

"It was but the habit in me that made me name Osiris. There is no god for me, but Love."

"So long, so long, Kenkenes, and not any change in thee?" she sighed. "How hath Egypt been helped of her gods, these grievous days?"

"The gods and the gods, and ever the gods!" he said. "What have we to do with them? Deborah bade me turn from them and this I have done with

all sincerity. Much have I pondered on the question and this have I concluded. Egypt's holy temples have been vainly built; her worship has been wasted on the air. There was and is a Creator, but, Rachel, that Power whose mind is troubled with the great things is too great to behold the petty concerns of men. My fortunes and thine we must direct, for though we implored that Power till we died from the fervor of our supplications, It could not hear, whose ears are filled with the murmurings of the traveling stars. Why we were created and forgotten, we may not know. How may we guess the motives of anything too great for us to conceive? Whatsoever befalls us results from our use at the hands of men, or from the nature of our abiding-place. We must defend ourselves, prosper ourselves and live for what we make of life. After that we shall not know the troubles and the joys of the world, for the tombs are restful and soundless. Is it not so, my Rachel?"

She shook her head. "Thou hast gone astray, Kenkenes. But thou wast untaught—"

"I have reasoned, Rachel, and the Power I have found in my ponderings, makes all the gods seem little. Thy God must manifest himself more fearfully; he must overthrow my reasoning before I can bow to him. And if, of a surety, he is greater than the Power I have made, will he need my adoration or listen to my prayers? Nay, nay, my Rachel. If thou wilt have me worship, let me fall on my face to thee—"

She interrupted him with a quick gesture.

"Kenkenes, have I prayed in vain for the light to fall on thee?" she asked sadly.

He smiled and moved closer, looking down into her face as he had done when he studied it as Athor.

"Nay, hast thou done that, and hast thou not been heard? Thou dost but fix me in mine unbelief. Did any god exist he would have heard thy supplications. Come, let us make an end of this. There are sweeter themes I would discuss. Where hast thou been, these many months? Not here in this haunted cave?"

His lightness sank her hope to the lowest ebb. A sudden hurt reached her heart. His unregeneracy suggested unfaithfulness to her. Their positions had been reversed. It was she that had been denied. Duty reasserted itself with a chiding sting.

"I have been a guest with Masanath—"

"The daughter of Har-hat!" he cried, retreating a step.

"The daughter of mine enemy," she went on. "She found me here by accident and took me to her home in Memphis. There Deborah died. And there, eighteen days agone, I discovered who it was that sheltered me, and now I return to my people."

"The fan-bearer did not find thee?" he demanded at once.

"Nay. Unseen, I looked upon his man. Alas! the wound to the daughter-love in Masanath! On the morrow she departeth for Tanis where she will wed with the Prince Rameses."

Kenkenes' hands fell to his sides. "Nay, now! Of a surety, this is the maddest caprice the Hathors ever wrought. In the house of thine enemy! Well for me I did not know it! I should have died from very apprehension. And all these months thou wast within sight of my father's doors!"

"I saw him once," she said.

"And discovered not thyself! How cruelly thou hast used thyself, Rachel. He would have told thee, long ago, why I came not back."

"Aye, now I know; but, Kenkenes, I could not go, fearing—"

"Enough. I forgot. Come, let us go hence. Memphis and my father's house await thee now."

"But I go to my people, even now," she answered, with averted face and unready words.

Kenkenes whitened.

"And leave me?" he asked quietly.

"Think me not ungrateful," she said. "I have said no words of thanks since there is none that can express a tithe of my great indebtedness to thee."

"I have achieved nothing for thee. Not even have I won thy freedom. I have failed. But shameless in mine undeserts, I am come to ask my reward nevertheless." He was very near to her, his face full of purpose and intensity, his voice of great restraint.

"That which once thou didst refuse to hear, thou hast known for long by other proof than words," he went on. "Let me say it now. I love thee, Rachel." Taking her cold hands he drew her back to him.

"Once I forbore," he continued, the persuasive calm in his manner heightening, "because I knew it would hurt thee to say me 'nay.' I told myself that I was brave, then, when the actual loss of thee was distant. But thou wilt leave me now and my fortitude for thy sake is gone. I am selfish because I love thee so. The extreme is reached. I can withstand no more. Dost thou love me, Rachel?"

What need for him to wait for the word that gave

assent? Was there not eloquent testimony in her every feature and in every act of that hour he had been with her? But his hands trembled, holding hers, till she told him "aye."

"Then ask what thou wilt of me," he said, the restraint gone, desperation taking its place. "I submit, so thou dost yield thyself to me. Shall I pray thy prayers, kneel in thy shrines? Shall I go with thee into slavery? Shall I learn thy tongue, turn my back on my people, become one of Israel and hate Egypt? These things will I do, and more, so I shall find thee all mine own when they are done."

But she freed her hands to cover her face and weep. Kenkenes sighed from the very heaviness of his unhappiness.

"Thou shouldst hate me, if, to win thee, I bowed in pretense to thy God," he said weakly.

Perhaps his words awakened a hope or perhaps they made her desperate. Whatever the sensation, she raised her head and spoke with a sudden assumption of calm:

"Naught could make me hate thee, Kenkenes, but I should know if thou didst pretend. Thou art as transparent as air. Thou art honest, guileless—too good to be lost to the Bosom that must have thrilled with joy when he beheld what a beautiful soul His hands had wrought. Few of His believers have conceived the greatness of Jehovah as thou hast, O my Kenkenes. In that art thou proved ripe for His worship. Thou hast found His might to be so limitless that thou thinkest thyself as naught in His sight. In that hast thou gone astray. The mind is gross that can not heed the weak and small. Shall we say that the spin-

ner of the gossamer, the painter of the rose is not fine? Shall He forget His daintiest, frailest works for His mightiest? Thou, artist and creator thyself, Kenkenes, answer for Him. Nay; not so! He, who hath an ear to the lapse between an hour and an hour, hath counted His song-birds and numbered His blossoms. For are they, being small, less wondrous than the heavens, His handiwork? Shall He then fail to hear the voice of His sons in whom He hath taken greater pains?"

She paused for a moment and looked at him. His expression urged her on.

"Does it not trouble thee when I, whom thou hast but lately known, am in sorrow? How much more then does thine unhappiness vex His holy heart, who fashioned thee, who blew the breath of life into thy nostrils! Wilt thou deny the Hand that led thee to me, here, in this hour—that cared for me during the season of distress and peril? Nay, my beloved, there is no greater virtue than gratitude. It is an essential in the make-up of the great of heart—wilt thou put it out of thy fine nature?"

Again she paused, and this time he answered in a half-whisper:

"Thou dost shake me in mine heresy."

"It is but newly seated in thy credence," she said eagerly, "and is easy to be put aside—easier to cast off than was the idolatry. Put it away in truth from thee and grieve thy Lord God no more."

"Would that I could, now, this hour. We may discipline the soul and chasten the body, but how may we govern the mind and its disorderly beliefs? It

laughs at the sober restraint of the will; my heart is broken for its sake, but it is reprobate still."

"And I have not won thee?" she asked, shrinking from him.

"Give me time—teach me more—return not to Goshen. Come back to Memphis with me!" he begged in rapid words, pressing after her. "No man uncovered so great a problem, alone, in a moment. How shall I find God in an hour?"

"O had I the tongue of Miriam!" she exclaimed.

"Go not yet. Wilt thou give me up, after a single effort? Miriam could not win me, nor all thy priests. I shall be led by thee alone. A day longer—an hour—"

"But after the manner of man, thou wilt put off and wait and wait. Thou art too able, Kenkenes, too full of power for aid of mine—"

"Rachel, if thou goest into Goshen—" he began passionately, but she clutched him wildly, as if to hold him, though death itself dragged at her fingers.

"Hide me!" she gasped in a terrified whisper. "The servant of Har-hat!"

At the mention of his enemy's name, Kenkenes turned swiftly about.

Two half-clad Nubians were at the river's edge, hauling up an elegant passage boat. It was deep of draft and had many sets of oars. Approaching over the sand, hesitatingly, and with timid glances toward the tomb beyond, were four others. The foremost was the youth he had seen in Thebes. The next wore a striped tunic. Fourth and last was Unas.

"Now, by my soul," Kenkenes exclaimed aloud,

"there is no more mystery concerning the boy." He turned and took Rachel in his arms.

"Now, do thou test the helpfulness of thy God! I have been tricked and I see no help for us. Enter the tomb and close the door, and since thou lovest honor better than liberty, let this be thine escape."

He put his only weapon, his dagger, into her hands.

For an instant he gazed at her tense white face; then bending over her, he kissed her once and put her behind him.

"Go," he said.

"What want ye?" he demanded of the men.

"A slave," Unas answered evilly, stepping to the fore.

"Your authority?" The fat courier flourished a document and held up a blue jewel, hanging about his neck. Meneptah had forgotten his promise to return the lapis-lazuli signet to Mentu.

"Thou art undone, knave!" the courier added with a short laugh. He clapped his hands and the four Nubians advanced rapidly upon Kenkenes. There was to be no parley.

Kenkenes glanced at the youth. He was not full grown,—spare, light and small in stature.

"I am sorry for thee, boy," Kenkenes muttered. "Thy gods judge between thee and me!"

The Nubians, two by two, each man ready to spring, rushed.

With a bound, Kenkenes seized the youth by the ankles and swung him like an animate bludgeon over his head. The attacking party was too precipitate to halt in time and the yelling weapon swung round, horizontally mowing down the foremost pair of men

like wooden pins. The weight of the boy, more than the force of the blow, jerked him from the sculptor's hands. Kenkenes recovered himself and retreated. As he did so, he stumbled on a fragment of rock. He wrenched it from its bed and balanced it above his head.

The powerful figure with the primitive weapon was too savage a picture for the remaining pair to contemplate at close quarters. Unas had made no movement to help in the assault. He had felt the weight of the sculptor's hand and had evidently published the savagery of the young man to his assistants. They had come prepared to capture an athletic malefactor, but here was a jungle tiger brought to bay. They retired till their fallen fellows should arise.

The vanquished were struggling to gain their feet, and Kenkenes noted it with concern. He was not gaining in this lull. There were other stones about him. He hurled the fragment with a sure aim, and a Nubian, who had been overthrown, dropped limply and stretched himself on the sand.

With a howl the remaining three charged. They were too close for the second missile of Kenkenes to do any slaughter, and he went down under the combined attack, fighting insanely.

"Slit his throat," Unas shrieked, tumbling on the captive, as Kenkenes' superhuman struggles threatened to shake them off. One of the men raised himself and made ready to obey. Holding to Kenkenes with one hand, he drew a knife from his belt and prepared to strike.

At that instant, the captive caught sight of a pale woman-face, the eyes blazing with vengeance. There

was a flash of a white-sleeved arm and the thump and jolt of a dagger driven strongly through flesh. The murderous Nubian yelled and tumbled, kicking, on the sand. He carried a knife at the juncture of the neck and shoulder.

Instantly there was a chorus of yells.

"She-devil! Hyena!"

Unas detached himself from the struggle and plunged after Rachel, now in full sight of Kenkenes. He saw her retreat, warding off the fat courier with her hands; he saw her stumble and fall; he saw Anubis fly, with a chatter of rage, in the face of the courier, and struggling mightily, he threw off his captors, and leaped to his feet.

And then the light went out in Egypt!

CHAPTER XXXV

LIGHT AFTER DARKNESS

A water-carrier in Syene was carrying a yoke across his shoulders and the great earthen jars swung ponderously as he walked. His bare feet disturbed the red dust of the path down to the granite-basined river, and tiny clouds puffed out on each side of the way at every footfall.

On a housetop in Memphis, a gentlewoman, in a single gauze slip and many jewels, lounged on a rug and gazed at nothing across the city. A flat-shanked Ethiopian fanned her listlessly and dreamed also.

A little boy, innocent of raiment, stood before a new tomb, opposite Tanis and awaited his father who labored within.

The water-carrier collapsed in his tracks; the lady shrieked; the Ethiopian dropped the fan; the little boy fell on his face—all at the same instant.

From the sea to the first cataract, from the deepest recess in the Arabian hills to the remotest peak in the Libyan desert, Egypt was blinded and muffled and smothered in a dead, black night—even darkness that could be felt.

Kenkenes stood still. Harsh hands were no longer on him and for an instant no sound was to be heard. Profound gloom enveloped him. His every sense was frustrated.

Some one of his assailants had found his heart with a knife and this was death, he thought.

Then strange, far-off murmurings filled his ears. From the river and beside him went up wild, hoarse cries of men in mortal terror. Memphis began to drone like a vast and troubled hive. The distant pastures became blatant and the poultry near the huts of rustics cackled in wild dismay. In the hills about beasts whimpered and the air was full of the screaming of bewildered birds.

With the awakening of sound, Kenkenes knew that another plague had befallen Egypt.

The dread that might have transfixed him was overcome by the instant recollection of Rachel's peril. No restraining hands were upon him, but he stood yet a space attempting to catch some rift in the thick night.

There was not one ray of light.

While he waited it was more distinctly borne in upon him that during that space Rachel might suffer.

He would go to her.

The night made a wall ahead of him which was imminent and indiscernible. It was like a great weight upon his shoulders and a pitfall at his feet.

He crouched and fumbled before him. His apprehension was physical; his mind urged him; his body rebelled. He would have run but he could barely force one foot ahead of the other. Illusory obstacles confronted him. He waved his arms and put forward a foot. The ground was lower than he thought, and he stepped weightily. He brought up the other foot laboriously, hesitatingly. This was not advance, but time-losing.

Meanwhile, what might not be happening to Rachel

in this chaos of gloom and clamor? Why need he hide his escape? None of these near-by assailants had any care now save for his own safety.

He called her name loudly and listened.

There was no answer in her voice.

He forced himself to move, but had the next step led into an abyss his feet could not have been more reluctant. He flailed the air with his arms and accomplished another pace. He realized that he could not reach, in an hour, at this rate, the spot in which he had last seen her. Again he called, using his full lung power, but the only reply was an echo, or the hoarse supplications of men, near him and on the river. The river! Had Rachel gone that way too far and beyond retreat? The thought chilled him with terror and horror.

He execrated himself for his trepidation and strove wildly to proceed; but strive as he might he could not advance. How long since the darkness had fallen, and he had moved but two paces from the spot in which it had overtaken him! The outcry near him subsided into low murmurs of terror, and none lifted a voice in answer to his distracted call.

If Rachel had been near she would have replied to him. The alternatives he had to choose as her possible fate were death in the Nile or capture by Unas. The one he fought away from him wildly, the other made him frantic. And the realization of his own helplessness, with the picture of her distress at that moment, crushed him.

A tangle of wind-mown reeds tripped him and pitched him to his knees among the high marsh growth.

He did not rise.

The babe in pain cries to his mother; the man in his maturity may outgrow the susceptibility to tears, but he never outwears the want of a stronger spirit upon which to call in his hour of distress.

For Kenkenes it had been a far cry, from his careless days and his empyrean populous with deities, to this utter and unhappy night and one unseen Power. In that time he had run the gamut of sensations from a laugh to a wail. Now was his need the sorest of all his life. The most helpful of all hands must aid him. His fathers' gods were in the dust. What of that unapproachable, unfeeling Omnipotence he had created in their stead?

He fell on his face and prayed.

"O Thou, who art somewhere behind the phantom gods that we have raised! To whom all prayer ascends by many-charted paths; Thou who canst spread this sooty night across the morning skies and turn to milk the bones of men! Thou who didst undo my surest plans, who dost mock my boasted power, who hast stripped me till my feeble self is bared to me even in this dreadful night; Thou who wast a fending hand about her; who art her only succor now—to whom she prays—and by that sign, Thou Very God! I bow to Thee.

"My lips are stiff at prayer to such as Thou. But what need of my tongue's abashed interpretation of that which I would say, since even the future's history is open unto Thee?

"I have run my course without craving Thine aid, and lo! here have I ended—a voice appealing through the night—no more.

"Now, wilt Thou heed an alien's plea; wilt Thou

know a stranger petitioning before Thy high and holy place? How shall I win Thine ear? Charge me with any mission, weight me with a lifetime of penances, strip me of power everlastingly, but grant me leave to supplicate Thy throne.

"Not for myself do I pray, O Hidden God! Not one jot would I overtax Thy bounty toward me beyond the sufferance of my devotion. But for her I pray—for her, out somewhere in this unlifting gloom, her tender maidenhood uncomforted—with night, with death, with long dishonor threatening her. Attend her, O Thou august Warden! Let her not cry out to Thee in vain! Be Thou as a wall about her, as a light before her, as a firm path beneath her feet. Do Thou as Thou wilt with me. Lo! I offer up myself as ransom for her—myself—all I have! Take her from me, deny mine eyes the sight of her for ever, blot me wholly out of her heart, yield me over to the wrath of mine enemies, and to Thine unknowable vengeance thereafter; but save her, Great God! save her from her enemy!

"Dost Thou hear me, O Holy Mystery? Is there no sign, no manifestation that Thou dost attend?

"Nay, but I know that Thou hearest me! By my faith in Thy being I know it, Lord!"

Peace fell on him and he slept.

In after years Kenkenes remembered only vaguely the long hours of that black and lonely vigil. This climax to a calamitous space eight months in length might have crushed a less sturdy spirit, but he was mystically sustained.

With the exception of a few intervals of short duration most of the time was spent in sleep, so profound and dreamless as to border on coma. The reeds had

received him on a bed of crushed herbage and the upstanding ranks about him sheltered him from the blowing sand. The whilom assailants of the young man were not so kindly served by the gods to whom they appealed loudly and frequently. The city in the distance moaned and complained and the hills were full of fear.

In one of his profound lapses of slumber a hairy paw felt of Kenkenes' face. Later a drifting boat nosed about among the reeds at the water's edge. Presently one of the crew cried out, and a second voice said:

"Nay, fear not; it is an ape, by the feel of him. Toth is with us. It is a good omen; let him not go forth."

Silence fell again, for the boat drifted on.

At last dawn-lights reddened about the horizon; stars faded out of the uppermost as naturally as if they had been there during the three days of unlifting night. All Egypt showed up darkly in the coming day.

Kenkenes, in his couch of reeds, slept on peacefully.

The mid-morning sun shone in his face before he awakened.

He leaped to his feet, cramped and stiffened by his long inactivity, and looked about him. Near by was a disturbed spot of wide circumference. Here had the struggle taken place. Here, also, some of the sand was stained with the blood of the Nubian, who had been wounded by Rachel. Fresh footprints led toward the water. He followed them with a wildly beating heart. There were no marks of a little sandal. At the Nile edge the deep line cut by a keel was still visible in the wet sand. His own boat and the other were gone. All

other signs had been obliterated, for the wind had been busy during the darkness.

Across the cultivated land, or rather the land which would have been wheat-covered but for the locusts, he saw the huts of rustics, and to each of these he went, asking of the pallid and terror-stricken tenants if Rachel had come to them. Gaining no information, he went next to Masaarah, appeasing his hunger with succulent roots plucked from the loam beside the river. The quarries were deserted, the pocket in the valley, where the Israelites had pitched their tents, was as solitary as it had ever been. There was no place here to shelter the lost girl.

There were the huts to the north of the Marsh and the deserted village of Toora to search. He retraced his steps.

As he came again before the tomb he went to it. Half-way up the steps he stopped.

On a blank face of the rock, sheltered by a jutting ledge above it, was an inscription, a little faint, but he ascribed that to the poor quality of the pencil and roughness of the tablet. This is what he read:

"Her whom thou seekest thou wilt find in the palace of Har-hat, in the city."

Perhaps under other circumstances Kenkenes would have understood correctly the origin and intent of the writing. Already, however, his fears pointed to the palace of Har-hat as the prison of Rachel, and this faint inscription was corroboration. It appealed to him as villainy worthy of the fan-bearer. It was like his exquisite effrontery.

Kenkenes whirled away with an indescribable sound, rather like the snarl of an infuriated beast than an expression of a reasoning creature. Dashing down the sand, he plunged into the Nile and swam with superhuman speed for the Memphian shore.

He defied death as a maniac does. The river was a mile in width and teeming with crocodiles. But the same saving Providence that shields the adventurous child attended him. He clambered up the opposite bank and struck out for Memphis on a hard run.

He had but one purpose and that was to find Har-hat and strangle him with grim joy. The rescue of Rachel did not occur to him, for in his excited mind the simple touch of the fan-bearer's hand was sufficient to kill her with its dishonor.

He did not remember anything that Rachel had told him concerning her life in Memphis, or that Har-hat was in Tanis, and Masanath like to be the only resident in the fan-bearer's palace. His reasoning powers abandoned their supremacy to all the fierce impulses toward revenge and bloodletting of which his nature was capable.

Though it was day when he entered the great capital of the Pharaohs, the streets were almost deserted, and every doorway and window showed interiors brilliant with a multitude of lamps. Memphis was prepared against a second smothering of the lights of heaven.

The few pedestrians Kenkenes met fell back and gave room to the dripping apparition which ran as if death-pursued. One told him on demand where the mansion of Har-hat stood, and after a few slow minutes he was within its porch. He flung himself against

the blank portal and beat on it. He did not pause to await a response. He felt within him strength to batter down the doors if they did not open.

Presently an old portress came forth from a side entry and Kenkenes seized her. Fearing that she might cry out and defeat his purpose, he put his hand over her mouth.

"Your master," he demanded hoarsely. "Where is he? Answer and answer quietly!"

For a moment she was dumb with terror.

"Gone," she gasped at last when Kenkenes shook her.

"Where? When?" he insisted.

"To Tanis, eight months since!"

"Was an Israelite maiden brought here? Answer and truly, by your immortal soul!"

"Many months ago, aye, but she departed three days ago for Goshen," the old woman answered falteringly.

"And she came not back?"

"Nay."

"Swear, by Osiris!"

"By Osiris—"

"And the Lady Masanath?"

"Gone, also, to Tanis with Unas, this morning."

"Thou liest! In the dark?"

"Nay, I swear by Osiris," she protested wildly. "The light came in with the hour of dawn."

Kenkenes released her and hurried away. He did not doubt that the old woman had told the truth. He had overslept the light. Unas could not have taken Rachel and Masanath to Tanis together. The Israelite would have been sent on before.

There was yet Atsu to question, and then—on to Tanis to rescue Rachel or to avenge her.

He met no one until he reached a bazaar of jewels near the temple square. An armed watchman stood before the tightly closed front of the lapidary's booth, above the portal of which a flaring torch was stuck in a sconce.

"The house of Atsu?" the watchman repeated after Kenkenes. "Atsu is no longer a householder in Memphis."

"When did he depart?"

"Eight or nine months ago, at the persuasion of the Pharaoh."

The lightness of the man's manner irritated the already vexed spirit of the young artist.

"Be explicit," he demanded sharply. "What meanest thou?"

"He was stripped of his insignia and reduced to the rank of ordinary soldier," the man answered, "for pampering the Israelites. He is with the legions in the north."

"Hath he kin in the city?"

"Nay, he is solitary."

Kenkenes walked away unsteadily. The nervous energy that had upborne him during his intense excitement was deserting him. His hunger and weariness were asserting themselves.

He turned down the narrow passage leading to his father's house. And suddenly, in the way of such vagrant thoughts, it occurred to him that the inscription on the tomb had been pointedly denied by the old woman's statements.

"Ah, I might have known," he said impatiently.

"Rachel put the writing there for me when she left the tomb for the shelter Masanath offered her in Memphis."

The admission cheered him somewhat, but it did not repair his exhausted forces. By the time he reached his father's door he was unsteady, indeed, and beyond further exertion.

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE MURKET'S SACRIFICE

The murket sat at his place in the work-room, but no papyrus scrolls lay before him; his fine implements were not in sight; the ink-pots and pens were put away and the table was clear except for a copper lamp that sputtered and flared at one end. The great artist's arms were extended across the table, his head bowed upon them, his hands clasped. The attitude was not that of weariness but of trouble.

Kenkenes hesitated. For the first time since the hour he left Memphis for Thebes, months before, he felt a sense of culpability. He realized, with great bounds of comprehension, that the results of his own trouble had not been confined to himself. He began to understand how infectious sorrow is.

He crossed the room and laid a trembling hand on the murket's shoulder. Instantly the great artist lifted his head and, seeing Kenkenes, leaped to his feet with a cry that was all joy.

The young man responded to the kiss of welcome with so little composure that Mentu forced him down on the bench and summoned a servant.

The old housekeeper appeared at the door, started with a suppressed cry and flung herself at her young master's feet. He raised her and touched her cheek with his lips.

"Bring me somewhat to eat and drink, Sema," he said weakly. "I have fasted since I returned here, well-nigh four days agone."

The stiff old creature rose with a murmur half of compassion, half of promise, and went forth immediately.

The murket stood very close to his son, regarding him with interrogation on his face.

"Memphis was full of famishing at the coming of dawn this morning," he said. "For the first time in my life I knew hunger, and it is a fearsome thing, but thou —a shade from Amenti could not be ghastlier. Where hast thou been—what are thy fortunes, Kenkenes?"

"Rachel—thou knowest—" Kenkenes began, speaking with an effort.

"Aye, I know. Didst find her?"

"Aye, and lost her, even while I fought to save her!"

"Alas, thou unfortunate!" Mentu exclaimed. "Of a surety the gods have punished thee too harshly!"

Kenkenes was not in the frame of mind to receive so soft a speech composedly. A strong tremor ran over him and he averted his face. The murket came to his side and smoothed the damp hair.

The old housekeeper entered with broth and bread and a bottle of wine. Mentu broke the bread and filled the beaker, while Sema stood aloof and gazed with troubled eyes at the unhappy face of the young master. Silent, they watched him eat and drink, grieved because of the visible effort it required and because no life or strength returned to him with the breaking of his fast. When he had finished, the bowl and platter were taken away, but at a sign the old housekeeper

left the wine with the murket. After she had gone Mentu glanced at the draggled dress of his son.

"Thou needest, further, the attention of thy slave, Kenkenes," he suggested.

The young man shook his head. "Not yet," he said. "My time is short, and it is thy help I need."

The murket sat down beside his son.

Without further introduction Kenkenes plunged into his story. He had had no time to tell it four days before. Then he had asked for Rachel with his second word, and finding her not, had rushed immediately to the search for her.

Mentu heard without comment till the story was done. Most of it he had known from Hotep, and only the recent events at the tomb excited him.

When Kenkenes made an end the murket brought his clenched hand down on the table with a force that made the lamp wink and the implements rattle in their boxes above him.

"Curse that smooth villain Har-hat!" he cried in a tempest of wrath. "A murrain upon his greedy, crafty lust! The gods blast him in his knavery! Now is my precious amulet in his hands. Would it were white-hot and clung to him like a leech!"

Kenkenes said nothing. The murket's wrath was more comforting to him than tender words could have been.

"Who hath the ear of Meneptah?" the murket continued with increasing vehemence. "Har-hat! And behold the miseries of Egypt! Shall we put any great sin past the knave who sinneth monstrously, or divine his methods who is a master of cunning? The land is entangled in difficulty! Give me but a raveling

fiber to pull, and, by the gods, I know that we shall find Har-hat at the other end of it! He is destroying Egypt for his ambition's sake! And that a son of mine—me! the right hand of the Incomparable Pharaoh—should furnish meat for his rending!" His voice failed him and he shook his clenched hands high above his head in an abandon of fury.

"Did I not tell thee?" he burst forth again, pointing a finger at his son. "Did I not warn thee from the first?"

Kenkenes raised his head.

"Can you avoid a knave if he hath designs on you?" he asked. "Have I erred in crossing his will? Have I sinned in loving and protecting her whom I love?"

Mentu's hands fell down at his sides. The simple questions had silenced him. His son was blameless now that he had expiated his offenses against the law, and from the moral standpoint his persistence in his claim on Rachel was just—praiseworthy.

"Nay," he said sullenly, "but since thou didst love the girl, how came it that thou didst not wed her long ago and save her this shame and danger?"

He saw the face of his son grow paler.

"The bar of faith lay between us," Kenkenes answered. "I was an idolater, she a worshiper of the One God. She would not wed with me, therefore."

The murket looked at his son, stupefied with amazement.

"Thou—thou—" he said at last, his words coming slowly by reason of his emotions. "The Israelite rejected thee!"

Kenkenes bent his head in assent.

"Thou! A prince among men—a nobleman, a genius

—a man whom all women—Kenkenes! by Horus, I am amazed! And thou didst endure it, and continue to love and serve and suffer for her! Where is thy pride?"

Kenkenes stopped him with a motion of his hand.

"A maid's unwillingness is obstacle enough," he said. "Shall a man summon further difficulty in the form of his self-esteem to stand in the way of his love? Nay, it could not be, and that thou knowest, my father, since thou, too, hast loved. When a man is in love it is his pride to be long-suffering and humble. But there is naught separating us now save it be the hand of Har-hat."

"So much for Israelitish zeal! Thou hast been a pawn for her to play during these months. Long ago had she surrendered if thou hadst been—"

Kenkenes smiled. "She did not surrender. It was I."

"Thy faith?" the murket asked in a voice low with earnestness.

"Thou hast said!"

A dead silence ensued. Kenkenes may have awaited the outbreak with a quickening of the heart, but it did not come. Instead, the murket sat down on the bench and gazed at his son intently.

After a long interval he spoke.

"Thus far had I hoped that thou wast taken by the Israelite but in thy fancy. The hope was vain. Thou art in love with her."

Kenkenes endured the steady gaze and waited for Mentu to go on.

"There is no help for thee now," the murket continued stoically. "If the gods will but tolerate thee

till the madness leaves thee after thou art wedded and satisfied, it may be that thou wilt turn again to the faith of thy fathers. But if I would fix thee in thine apostasy I should try to persuade thee now."

"Aye, and further, I should be moved to urge thee into heresy," calmly responded Kenkenes.

The murket flung up one hand in a gesture of dissent, and arising, walked toward the door of the workroom. There he leaned his shoulder against the frame and looked out at the night. Presently Kenkenes went to him and laid his hand on his sleeve.

The murket spoke first, proving what thoughts had been his during the little space of silence.

"There is little patriotism in thee, Kenkenes. Thou wouldst wed with one of Egypt's enemies and bow down to the God which has devastated thy country."

The hand on his sleeve fell.

"What did Egypt to Israel for a hundred years before these miseries came to pass?" Kenkenes asked. "Let me tell thee how Egypt hath used Rachel. She is free-born, of noble blood, even as thou art and as I am. Her house was wealthy, the name powerful. There were ten of her family—four of her mother's, six of her father's. Rameses, the Incomparable Pharaoh, had use for their treasure and need of their labor in the brick-fields and mines. This day Rachel possesses not even her own soul and body, nor one garment to cover herself, nor a single kinsman to shield her from the power of her masters! Well for Egypt that the God of Israel hath not demanded of Egypt treasure for treasure seized, toil for toil compelled, lash for lash inflicted, blood for blood outpoured! This desolation had been thrice desolate and Egypt's glory

gone like the green grass in the breath of the Khamsin! And yet would such justice restore to Rachel the love she lost, the comfort that should have been hers? Nay, not even the sorcery of Mesu might do that. The debt of Egypt to Rachel is most cheaply discharged by the service of one life for the ten which were taken from her!"

"Let be; Israel shall cumber Egypt no longer," the murket muttered after a little; "and the quarrel between them shall be at an end. The hour approacheth when every Hebrew shall leave Egypt—shall be driven forth if he leave it not willingly."

"Thinkest thou so of a truth?" Kenkenes asked earnestly.

"Of a truth. Thou seest the plight of the nation. Can it endure longer? And if thou takest this Israelite to wife—" He paused abruptly, for he had pressed the problem and a solution opened itself so suddenly that it staggered him. Kenkenes understood the pause. Again he laid his hand on the murket's sleeve.

"On this very matter would I take counsel with thee, my father," he said gently. "The night grows, and my time is short."

Mentu turned an unhappy face toward his son and followed him back to the bench they had left. He felt, intuitively, that there was further grave purpose in the young man's mind and there was dread in his paternal heart.

"Thou knowest, my father," Kenkenes began, "that I may not give over my love for Rachel. I am free to love her and she to love me. There is no obstacle between us. Such love, therefore, in the sight of heaven, becometh a duty and carrieth duty with it. In the

spirit I am as though I had been bound to her by the marrying priests. Her griefs are mine to comfort, her wrongs mine to avenge.

"She is gone and there are these three surmises as to her whereabouts. She may have escaped and returned to Goshen; she may have wandered to death in the Nile; she may have been taken by Har-hat."

He paused, and Mentu gazed fixedly at the lamp.

"I am going to Tanis," Kenkenes began, with forced restraint.

"Wherefore?" Mentu demanded.

"To discover if Har-hat hath taken her!"

"Go on."

"If he hath the Lord God make iron of my hands till I strangle him!"

"Madman!" Mentu exclaimed. "Thou wilt be flayed!"

"Be assured that I shall earn the flaying! The punishment shall be no more savage than the deed that invites it! But enough of that. If I go to Tanis and find her the spoil of the fan-bearer, thine augury will hold. I return not to Memphis. . . . If she was lost in the Nile—!"

"Nay! Nay! put away the thought if it wrench thee so. No man removed from his place during that night. We were caught and transfixed at what we did. For three days I sat in the court, where I was overtaken by the darkness, and in that time I stirred not except to slip down on the bench and sleep. The palsy seized all Memphis likewise—not one of my neighbors moved. But the resident Hebrews of the city seemed to have been warned, or else the favor of their strange God was with them. For it is said they came and went as they willed, carrying lamps."

Kenkenes looked at his father with growing hope.

"If that be true," he said eagerly, "if the palsy fell upon Egypt and not upon Israel, Rachel may have fled safely—she may have escaped them!" Mentu assented with a nod.

"She may have returned to her people," Kenkenes went on. "And if she be in Goshen I must reach her, find her, before her people depart. Having found her—" but Kenkenes stopped and made no effort to resume. Mentu set his teeth, his hands clenched and his whole figure seemed to denote intense physical restraint. Suddenly he whirled upon his son.

"Thou wilt go with her, out of Egypt?" he demanded.

"I shall go with her, out of Egypt."

Mentu gained his feet. "And dost thou remember that while I live my commands are yet law over thee?" he continued in a tone of increasing intensity. "Mine it is to say whether thou shalt do this thing or do it not!"

He turned away and strode back to his post against the door-frame, his face toward the night. Kenkenes had slowly risen to his feet. Not for an instant did his father's authority appear to him as an obstacle. He knew that the murket's outburst was a final stand before capitulation. Kenkenes was troubled only for what might follow after his father had surrendered.

He followed the murket to the door and laid his arm across the broad shoulders.

"Father," he said persuasively. Mentu did not move.

"Look at me, father," Kenkenes insisted. Still no movement. The young man put his arm closer about

the shoulders, and lifting his hand, would have turned the face toward him. But the palm touched a wet cheek.

The murket had consented.

* * * * * * *

An hour later, when it was far into the second watch, Kenkenes changed his dress and made himself presentable. Then, without further counsel with the murket, he went silently and unseen to the portal of Senci's house. After a long time, for her household had been asleep, he was admitted, and the Lady Senci, perplexed and surprised, joined him in the chamber of guests.

With few and simple words he told his story, pictured his father's loneliness and, while she wept silently, begged her to become his father's wife—on the morrow.

There was no long persuasion; the need of the occasion was sufficient eloquence for the murket's noble love.

An hour after the next day's sunrise Mentu and Senci repaired together to the temple, and when they returned Senci went not again into her own house.

In preparing for his departure, Kenkenes asked at the hands of his father, not his patrimony, for that would have been an embarrassment of wealth, but such portion of it as might be carried in small bulk. In mid-afternoon Senci brought him a belt of gazelle-hide and in this had been sewed a fortune in gems. The murket had given his son his full portion and more.

At the close of day, with his face set and colorless, Kenkenes stepped into the narrow passage before his

father's house. The great portal closed slowly and noiselessly behind him. He did not pause, but sprang into his chariot and was driven rapidly away.

At a landing near the northern limits of Memphis he took a punt, bade farewell to his sad-faced charioteer and pushed off.

The broken bluffs about Memphis, the temples, the obelisks, the Sphinx, the pyramids melted into night behind him. He kept his head down that he might not look his last on his native city.

He had reached that point where endurance must conserve itself.

CHAPTER XXXVII

AT THE WELL

Once out of its confines the Nile divided its flood over and over again and hunted the sea in long meanderings over the flat Delta. A few miles above On the separation began and continued to the marshy coast far to the north. From the summit of the great towers of Bubastis and Saïs the glistening sinuosities of its branches might be discerned for many miles.

There was no thirst in the Delta. Nowhere did the capillary, the irrigation canal, fail to reach, even now in the season of desolation and loss. Half-green stubble, hail-mown and locust-eaten, showed where a wheat-field had been. Regular, barren rows were the only evidences of the lentil and garlic gardens in happier days, and the location of pastures might be guessed by the skeletons that whitened the uplands. Through fringes of leafless palm trees, stone-rimmed pools, like splashes of quicksilver or facets of sapphire, reflected the sky.

Half-way between On and Pa-Ramesu was one of these basins, elliptical in shape and walled with rough limestone. Moss grew in the crevices of the masonry and about it had been a sod of velvet grass. Black beetles slipped in and out among the stones; dragonflies hung over the surface of the water and large ants

made erratic journeys about the rough bark of the naked palms. Whoever came dipped his goblet deep, for there the water was cold. If he gazed through to the bottom he detected a convection in the sand below. This was not a reservoir, but a well.

Once only had it failed, but then Hapi, the holy river, had been smitten also.

The spring bubbled up at the division of a road. One branch led along the northern bank of the Rameside canal, eastward to Pa-Ramesu. The other crossed the northwestern limits of Goshen and went toward Tanis, in the northeast. Round about the little oasis were the dark circles where the turf fires of many travelers had been. The merchants from the Orient entering Egypt through the great wall of Rameses II, across the eastern isthmus, passed this way going to Memphis. Here Philistine, Damascene, Ninevite and Babylonian had halted; here Egyptian, Bedouin, Arabian and the dweller of the desert had paused. The earth about the well was always damp, and the topmost row of the curb was worn smooth in hollows. This, therefore, was a point common to native and alien, the home-keeping and the traveler, the faithful and the unbeliever.

The strait of Egypt was sore and the aid of the gods essential. The priests had seized upon the site as a place of prayers, placed a tablet there, commanding them, and a soldier to see that the command was obeyed.

The soldier was in cavalry dress of tunic and tasseled coif, with pike and bull-hide shield and a light broadsword. He was no ordinary bearer of arms. He walked like a man accustomed to command; he

turned a cold eye upon too-familiar wayfarers and startled them into silence by the level blackness of his low brows. Wealth, beauty, age nor rank won servility or superciliousness from him. The Egyptian soldier was not obliged to cringe, and this one abode by the privilege.

He was a man of one attitude, one mood and few words. The Memnon might as well have been expected to smile. The earliest riser found him there; the latest night wanderer came upon him. When the day broke, after the falling of the dreadful night, the brave or the thirsty who ventured forth saw him at his post, silent, unastonished, unafraid.

Once only the soldier had been seen to flinch. Merenra, now nomarch of Bubastis, but whilom commander over Israel at Pa-Ramesu, paused one noon with his train at the well. The governor glanced at the soldier, glanced again, shrugged his shoulders and rode away. The man-at-arms winced, and often thereafter stood in abstracted contemplation of the distance.

Just after sunrise on the second day following the passing of the darkness, four Egyptians, lank, big-footed and brown, came from the northeast. By their dress they had been prosperous rustics of the un-Israelite Delta. But the healthful leanness, characteristic of the race, had become emaciation; there was the studious unkemptness of mourning upon them, and they, who had ridden once, before the plagues of murrain and hail, traveled afoot.

They were evidently journeying to On, where the benevolence of Ra would feed them.

They said nothing, looking a little awed at the soldier and puzzled at the stela. The warrior read the

command and the unlettered men fell on their knees, each to a different god. The Egyptian was not ashamed of his piety nor did he closet himself to pray.

"Incline the will of the Pharaoh to accord with the needs of the hour, O thou Melter of Hearts!"

"Rescue the kingdom, O thou Controller of Nations, for it descendeth into death and none succoreth it!"

"Deal thou as thou deemest best with the destroyer of Egypt, O thou Magistrate over Kings!"

Thus, in these fragments of prayers was it made manifest that the worm was turning, apologetically, it is true, but surely. For once the prescribed defense of the Pharaoh was ignored. "It is not the fault of the Child of the Sun, but his advisers, who are evil men and full of guile." And in the odd perversity of fate for once its observance would have been just.

Having fulfilled the command and relieved their souls, the four arose and went their way, soft of foot and stately of carriage, after the manner of all their countrymen.

Next, descending with a volley of yells, a rout of the nomad tribes, mounted on horses, came from the southwest.

They were chiefly Bedouins, their women perched behind them with the tiniest members of their broods. But every child that could bestride a horse was mounted independently. Whatever worldly possessions the nomads owned were bound in numerous flat rolls on other horses which they led.

"Hail!" they shouted to the warrior, for the desert races are prankish and unabashed. A younger among them, without wife or goods, drew his gaunt horse back upon its scarred haunches and saluted the soldier.

"Greeting, bearer of many arms!" he said, and then addressed a near-by companion as if he were rods away. "Behold leaden-toed Egypt, cumbered with defense! Bull-hide for shield instead of the safe remoteness of distance, blade and pike for vulgar intimacy in combat instead of the nice aloofness of the launched spear—"

"Go to, thou prater!" interrupted a companion. "If thou lovest Bedouin warfare so well, wherefore dost thou join thyself to the Israelite who fights not at all?"

"Spoil!" retorted the first, "and new fields, O waster of the air! Hast thou not heard of Canaan?"

"Nay," shouted a third, "he hath an eye only to some heifer-eyed brickmaker among them!"

The soldier moved forward to the group and grounded his pike. His attitude interested them, and in the expectant silence he repeated the writing on the tablet.

"So saith the writing," the first speaker began, but the warrior interrupted him.

"It behooves thee to obey. Thou art yet within the reach of the awkward arms of Egypt."

"One against a troop of Bedouins," the trifler laughed.

"And there are a thousand within sound of my beaten shield," was the harsh answer.

"Come," said an elder complacently, "it does no harm to ask the alleviation of any man's hurt, and it may keep us whole for the journey into Canaan." He dismounted, and in a twinkling the company, even to the babes, had followed his example. Each dropped to his haunches, his hands spread upon his knees, and there was no sound for a few minutes.

Then they rose simultaneously and, flinging themselves upon their horses, departed as they came, like the whirlwind, over the road to Pa-Ramesu and the heart of Goshen.

These were part of the mixed multitude that went with Israel.

The dust of their going had hardly settled before a drove of hosannahing Israelites approached from the direction of the Nile. The soldier saw them without seeming to see and, moving toward the tablet, a four-foot stela of sandstone, planted himself against its inscribed face, and, resting his pike, contemplated the west.

The ragged rout approached, singing and shouting, noisy and of doubtful temper. A cloud of dust came with them and the odor of stall and of quarry sweat.

Want plays havoc with the Oriental's appearance. It acutely accentuates his already aggressive features and reduces his color to ghastliness. The approaching Hebrews were studies of sharp angularity in monochrome, and the soul which showed in the eyes was no longer a spiritual but a ravenous thing.

Being something distinctly Egyptian, the soldier brought their actual temper to the surface. They had suffered long, but their time had come.

The foremost flung themselves into his view and halted, hushed and amazed. When those behind them tried to press forward with jeers, they turned with a frown and a significant jerk of the head in the direction of the man-at-arms. These, also, subsided and passed along the sign of silence. A leader in the front rank walked away and took a drink, using his hands as

a cup. The whole silent herd followed and did likewise, solemnly and thoughtfully.

Presently the bolder began to whisper and conjecture among themselves, hushing the sibilant surmises of the humbler with a cautioning frown. An old man, who could not lower his voice, quavered a resolve to "ask and discover," and started toward the soldier to put his resolution into effect. A wiry old woman seized him and drew him back.

"Wilt thou humiliate him with thy notice, meddler?" she demanded in a fierce whisper. "See him not, and it will be a mercy to him in his hour of abasement,—him who hath been balsam to the wound of Israel!"

She turned about and took the road toward Pa-Ramesu, the unprotesting old man trotting after her. The crowd followed, silent at first, then softly talkative, and finally, in the distance, singing and noisy once again.

A careening camel, almost white in the early morning sunshine, broke the sky-line far up the road leading from Tanis in the north. Very much nearer, to the west, two single litters, with a staff-bearing attendant, were approaching.

The camel rider was a Hebrew by the beast that bore him. Egypt had no liking for the bearer of the Orient's burdens and small acquaintance with him. Likewise the litters were Hebraic, for the attendant was bearded. The soldier kept his place before the stela and contemplated the distance.

The time was not long, though in that land of distances the camel had far to come from the horizon to the well, until by the soft jarring of the earth the mo-

tionless sentinel knew that the swifter traveler had arrived. Haste is not common in tropical countries, and the camel had been put to his limit of speed. A commoner spirit than the soldier's could not have resisted the impulses of curiosity concerning this hot haste. But he did not turn his eyes.

The traveler alighted before his mount ceased to move, and undoing his leathern belt with a jerk, he struck the camel a smart blow on the shoulder. There was the protesting buzz of a large fly and an angry, disabled blundering on the sand, silenced by the stamp of a sandal.

"Thou wouldst have it, pest!" the traveler exclaimed. "Thy kind is not to be persuaded from its blood-sucking by milder means. Ye mind me of the Pharaoh!"

He turned toward the well, and his glance fell on the man-at-arms for the first time. He started a little to find himself not alone, and a second time he started with sudden recognition. The well was between him and the soldier. He leaned upon his hands on the top of the curb and gazed at his opposite. Once he seemed about to speak, but the studious disregard of the soldier deterred him. Slowly his eyes fell until they were directed thoughtfully through his own reflection into the green depths of the well.

Although there were ten years in favor of the Egyptian, there was a certain similarity between the two men. Both were soldiers, both black and stern. But one was a Hebrew, no less than forty-five years of age.

He wore a helmet of polished metal, equipped with a visor, which, when raised, finished the front with a flat plate. The top of the head-piece was ornamented

with a spike. His armor was complete—shirt of mail, shenti extending half-way to the knees, greaves of brass and mailed shoes.

He was as tall as the Egyptian and as lean, but his structure was heavy, stalwart and powerful. His forehead was broad and bold, his eyes deep-set, steel-blue and keen. He had the fighting nose, over-long and hooked like an eagle's beak. The inexorable character of his features was borne out by the mouth, thin-lipped and firm in its closing. Even his beard, scant and touched with gray, was intractable. Here was an Israelite who was a warrior, a rare thing—but splendid when found.

After a pause he turned, and the camel knelt at his command. The litters had halted a little distance away under two palms that leaned their leafless crowns together. The attendant was hastening toward the well.

"Joshua!" he cried joyously.

"Even I," the Hebrew soldier said, walking around the kneeling beast. "Peace to thee, Caleb."

The two men embraced; the warrior imperturbably, the attendant tearfully.

"What dost thou away from Goshen?" Joshua asked, disengaging himself. "The faithful of Israel have been summoned thither from the remotenesses of Mizraim."

But Caleb did not hear, having caught sight of the Egyptian. The recognition startled him as it had all the others, but he did not hold his peace.

"Atsu!" he exclaimed. Joshua checked him.

"Vex him not with attention," he said in a lowered

tone. "His fall hath been great, but it hath not killed his pride. He would speak if it hurt him to be unremembered."

"Hath he a grudge against us?" Caleb asked in astonishment.

"Nay, look thou at the writing on the tablet. He would hide its command from us. Is he not a friend to Israel still?"

He indicated the characters on either side of the soldier. The words were disconnected, but the sense was easily guessed. The command for prayers to the Pantheon of Egypt was not hidden, beyond conjecture, from the discerning. Caleb saw the meaning of the inscription, but looked to Joshua for further enlightenment.

"He would spare us," the abler Israelite said. "Let us return the kindness and see him not."

All this had the Egyptian heard, but his eyes, fixed so absently on the horizon, seemed to indicate that he was not conscious of his surroundings.

Joshua repeated his question.

"I was sent forth with Miriam," Caleb made answer. "She hath been abroad, gathering up the scattered chosen."

His eyes brightened and he clasped his hands with the gesture of a happy woman.

"Deliverance is at hand! Doubt it not, O Son of Nun! We go forth!" he exclaimed.

On the camel were hung a shield, a javelin and a quiver of arrows. Joshua jostled the arrows in their case before answering.

"Not as the moon changes," he said grimly. "The

time for mild departure is past and the word of the Lord God unto Moses must be fulfilled."

"So we but go," Caleb assented, "I care not. And such is the temper of all Israel—nay," he broke off, conscientiously; "there is an exception, an unusual exception."

"There may be more," Joshua replied. "There is much in Egypt to hold the slavish. But the captain of Israel hath called me, out of peaceful shepherd life, to the severe fortunes of a warrior, and I go, no mile too short, no moment too swift, that shall speed me into Pa-Ramesu."

"And thou takest up arms for Israel?" Caleb cried. "Ah! but Moses hath gloved his right hand in mail, in thee, O Son of Nun! But," he continued, uneasy with his story untold, "this was no slavish content under a master. Rather did it come from one of the best of Israel."

"Strange that the lofty of Israel should regret a departure from the land of the oppressors." Joshua settled himself on the camel and the tall beast rose to its feet with a lurch.

"Even so," Caleb answered, patting the nose of the camel and arranging the tassels of its halter. "It was a quarry-slave, a maiden and of gentle blood among the nobility of Israel. She is in the bamboo litter, Miriam is in the other.

"We are come from farthest Egypt, fifty of us in three barges," he began. "To Syene have we been and all the Nilotic towns. To Nehapehu, and even deep into the Great Oasis were messengers sent, for we would not leave a single son of Abraham behind.

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"We are come from farthest Egypt, fifty of us in three barges," he began. "To Syene have we been and all the Nilotic towns. To Nehapehu, and even deep into the Great Oasis were messengers sent, for we would not leave a single son of Abraham behind.

And the masters surrendered them to a man! Was it the face of Miriam or the fear of Moses or the might of the Lord that tamed them? Hath Miriam a compelling glance, or Moses a power that came not from Jehovah? Nay, not so. Praised be His holy name!"

The mild Israelite clasped his hands and raised his eyes devoutly. But fearful lest his pause might furnish an opportunity for Joshua's escape, he continued at once:

"We were descending the Nile, below Memphis; the river sang and the hills lifted up their voices. There was rejoicing in the meadows and clapping of hands in the valleys. We possessed the gates of our enemies and Mizraim sat upon the shores and wept after us.

"Below Masaarah, the darkness fell; the sun perished in the morning and the stars were not summoned in the night, for the Lord had withdrawn the lights of heaven. But His hand was upon the waters and His glory stood about us and we feared not.

"And lo! there came a call upon Him from the shores to the east. The barge of Miriam paused and from the land we succored an Israelitish maiden. But when we would have moved on, she flung herself before Miriam and besought her:

" 'Depart not yet, for there is another.'

" 'Of the chosen?' the prophetess asked.

" 'Nay, an Egyptian, but better and above his kind.'

" 'Of the faith?' Miriam asked further. And the maiden faltered and said, 'Nay, not yet—but worthy and kindly.'

"But the prophetess bade the men at the poles to

continue, saying: 'Shall we c its misery. The lids
tent and rescue an oppressor? own with sorrow; the
"But the maiden clung ab lorless and pathetically
and prayed to her, while tl ng on the slight frame
nay' and 'Peace,' and sough tly clenched,
at that moment some one ary despair,
she put her hand over the shaken, took a step for-
not let her answer. And t e realization brought him
Then the maiden fell on nst the stela.
she will not be comforted.

Joshua drew himself e men grew fainter and
camel and shook its harn gain about the well.
"Love!" he said wit gray-faced and immovable,
and the strongest betwe , his hand gripping the pike,
"Nay," Caleb protest , began to chirr close about
"A daughter of I ered; the pike leaned in his
bluntly. "Dost thou f weakly. He shifted his posi-
"Nay, we go on to T up his head and resumed his
and Aaron who lie th nt on and yet he retained his
mons." ar passed and with it his phys-
"The parting shall
then. Peace to thee, thered all its forces, all the com-
peace." disappointment, rebuff, heart-
The warrior urg sness, and stormed his soul. He
stela-guarding soldi tching his arms across the top of
of the narrative, h and surrendered.
swing up the road t he unbroken circle of the earth
Caleb gazed afte esert of sky, solitary, soundless,
shape like the strok th and heaven, like a mundane
the mild Israelite l , lay between him and the little
and finally returne
ment were shoulde e's hoofs in the distance roused

him after a long time, and hastily turning his back toward the new-comer, he resumed at once his soldierly attitude.

The traveler bore down on him from the west and reined his horse at the intersection of the two roads. He looked up the straight highway toward Pa-Ramesu, then turned in the saddle and gazed toward Tanis. His indecision was not a wayfarer's casual hesitancy in the choice of roads. By the anxiety written on his face, life, fortune or love might be at stake upon the correct selection of route. Once or twice he looked at the soldier, but showed no inclination to ask advice, even had the man-at-arms turned his way.

It was one of fate's opportunities to be gracious. Here was Kenkenes seeking for the maiden whom he and the soldier loved, and it lay in the power of the unelect to direct the fortunate. But Kenkenes did not know the warrior, and Atsu had no desire to turn his unhappy face to the new-comer. The young man grew more and more troubled, his indecision more marked. Suddenly he dropped the reins, and without guiding the horse, urged the animal forward.

Kenkenes was relying on chance for direction.

Confused and unready the horse awaited the intelligent touch on the bridle. It did not come. He flung up his head and smelt the wind. Nervously he stamped and trod in one place, breathing loudly in protest.

The low voice of his rider continued to urge him.

Perhaps the wind from Goshen brought the smell of unblighted pastures. Whatever the reason, the horse turned, with uncertainty in his step and took the road eastward to Pa-Ramesu.

Having chosen, he went confidently, and as he was not halted and was young and swift, he increased his pace to a long run.

Meanwhile far to the north the little litter was borne toward Tanis. And Atsu, the warrior, did not move his eyes from the distant point where it had disappeared over the horizon.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE TRAITORS

The morning of the second day after the lifting of the darkness lay golden over Egypt, blue-shadowed before the houses and trees to the west and shimmering and illusory toward the east. A slow-moving, fragmentary cloud had gathered in the zenith just after dawn and for many minutes over the northern part of Goshen there had been a perpendicular downpour of illuminated rain. Now the sky was as clear and blue as a sapphire and the little wind was burdened with odorous scents from the clean-washed pastures of Israel.

Seti had crossed the border into Goshen at daybreak and was now well into the grazing-lands, yet scintillating with the rain. The hoofs of his fat little horse were patched with wet sand of the roadway and there was no dust on the prince's modest raiment. Behind the youth plodded two heavy-headed, limp-eared sumpter-mules, driven by a big-boned black.

Seti was not far from his destination, an obscure village of image-makers directly south of Tanis and situated on the northern border of Goshen. The same region that furnished clay to Israel for Egypt's bricks afforded material for terra-cotta statuettes.

Ahead of him were fields with clouds of sheep upon

the uplands and cattle standing under the shade of dom-palms. Here and there hovels with thatches no higher than a man's head, or low tents, dark with long use, and lifted at one side, stood in a setting of green. About them were orderly and productive gardens. Nowhere was any sign of the desolation that prevailed over Egypt.

Seti looked upon the beautiful prosperity of Goshen at first with the natural delight loveliness inspires, and then with as much savage resentment as his young soul could feel. Belting this garden and stretching for seven hundred miles to the south, was Egypt, desolate, barren and comatose. The God of the Hebrews had avenged them fearfully.

"They had provocation," he muttered to himself; "but they have overdone their vengeance."

A figure appeared on the road over the comb of a slight ridge, and Seti regarded the wayfarer with interest.

He was a Hebrew. His draperies were loose, voluminous, heavily fringed, and of such silky texture of linen that they flowed in the light wind. His head was covered with a wide kerchief, which was bound with a cord, and hid the forehead.

He was of good stature and upright, but his drapings were so ample that the structure of his frame was not discernible. His eyes were black, bright and young in their alertness, but the beard that rippled over his breast to his girdle was as white as the foam of the Middle Sea.

The Hebrew walked in the grass by the roadside and came on, his face expectant. At sight of the prince he stepped into the roadway. Seti drew up.

"Thou art Seti-Meneptah?" the ancient wayfarer asked.

"Even so," the prince answered.

The Hebrew put back his kerchief and stood uncovered.

"Dost thou know me, my son?" he asked.

"Thou art that Aaron, of the able tongue, brother to Mesu. Camest thou forth to meet me?"

The Hebrew readjusted the kerchief.

"Thou hast said."

"Wast thou, then, so impatient? Where is thy brother?"

"Nay. The village of image-makers is not safe. Moses hath departed for Zoan."*

"And named thee in his stead. But his mission to my father's capital bodes no good. He might have stayed until I could have persuaded him into friendship."

"Not with all thy gold!" said Aaron gravely.

"Nay, I had not meant that," Seti rejoined with some resentment. "If Egypt's plight can not win mercy from him by its own piteousness, the treasure I bring is not enough."

The Hebrew waved his hand as if to dismiss the subject.

"Let us not dispute so old a quarrel," he said. "We have a new sorrow, thou and I."

"Of Mesu's sending?"

"Nay, of thine own misplaced trust."

"What!" the prince exclaimed. "Have I clothed thy kinsman with more grace than he owns?"

*Zoan—The Hebrew name for Tanis.

"Thou hast put faith in thine enemy. A woman hath deceived thee."

"What dost thou tell me?" Seti cried, leaping to the ground and angrily confronting Aaron.

"A truth," the Hebrew answered calmly. "The Princess Ta-user is a fugitive charged with treason."

Seti turned cold and smote his forehead. "Undone through me!" he groaned.

"Not so, my son. Thou art undone through her. She betrayed thee."

Seti turned upon him with a fierce movement.

"Peace!" the Hebrew interrupted the furious speech on the prince's lips. "I bear thee no malice."

"I will give ear to no tales against the princess," Seti avowed with ire.

"Thy blind trust hath already wrought havoc with thee. Let it not bring heavy punishment upon thy head. Thou hast dealt kindly with me, and I am beholden to thee. Give me leave to discharge my debt."

The prince looked stubbornly at Aaron for a moment, but the doubt that had begun to assert itself in his mind clamored for proof or refutation.

"Say on," he said.

"The story is long," the Hebrew explained mildly, "and the sun is ardent. There are friends in yonder house. Let us ask the shelter of their roof for an hour."

Gathering his robes about him with peculiar grace, he went through the grass toward a low, capacious tent, pitched by a trickling branch of the great canal. Seti followed moodily.

A black-haired Israelitish woman, sitting on the

earth before the lifted side of the tent, arose, and reverently kissed the hem of Aaron's robes. Her dark-eyed brood appeared at various angles of the tent, and at a sign and a word from the woman they did obeisance and hailed the ancient visitor in soft Hebrew.

After a short colloquy between Aaron and the woman of Israel, the children were dismissed to play in the fields and the woman carried the bowl and basket of lentils out of ear-shot of her house.

"Let us enter," Aaron said, with an inclination of his head toward Seti. He stooped and preceded the young man into the home of the Hebrew.

The prince saw the black dispose himself on the grass outside, with his eyes upon the sumpter-mule.

Aaron sat upon one of the rugs, and Seti, following his example, took another.

"Say on," the prince urged.

The Hebrew began at once.

"What I tell thee, O my son, will soon be talked abroad over the land. But if thou hast a doubt in thy heart, and art like to question my truth-speaking, there are witnesses I may summon, such as no wise man will deny. And these be Jambres, and the twelve priests of the cities of the north, and the innkeeper at Pithom, also the governor over the treasure-city, his soldiers, and others, who know the secret by now.

"I will give thee the tale now, and the proof thereafter, if thou believest me not.

"Last night, I lay under the tent of a son of Israel, at Pithom. When I arose, two hours before dawn, horsemen began to gallop through the city toward the south. The inhabitants were aroused; there was much running to and fro, and the inn was full of lights.

"We approached, and when the tumult had died and the Egyptians were so full of the tidings that they were glad to relieve themselves even to an Israelite, I asked and learned this story. Many times afterward, on my way hither, I heard it from the lips of men whom I passed, so I am not deceived.

"Seven days agone, under an evil star, a veiled woman came to the temple of Bast, in the village of image-makers, and made offerings to the idol. She remained in the shrine, praying, for a time without reason, as though she pretended to worship, until a certain space should elapse. At the end of the hour in which she came, another woman, closely covered, her mouth hidden, entered and knelt near her. In a little they arose and went forth together, and Jambres, who is priest at the little temple, grown suspicious by reason of their behavior, looked after them. The wind swayed the garments of the second stranger, and showed the foot and ankle of a man. Filled with wonderment, Jambres laid aside his priest's robes and garbing himself like a wayfarer, followed. They left the village, going east where the road leadeth along the canal, which is hidden by the sprouts of young trees. Farther up the way were servitors who waited for the man and woman, but the two stepped out of ear-shot, and sat by the road to talk.

"Jambres, hidden in the fringe of bushes behind, heard them.

"They laid a snare. And thou, O Prince, wast to be trapped therein."

Seti's eyes were veiled and his face showed a heightening of color.

"Thou wast to come to the temple in the village of

image-makers with treasure to give into the hands of Moses. Thy message to my brother was to be delivered by the Princess Ta-user. She delivered it not. The word she should have brought came to Moses by a son of Belial, a godless Hebrew, sent by Jambres, for the brotherhood of priests would have had Moses come to the temple, for their own ends. But the servants of the Lord God of Israel are keen-eyed and they know a jackal from a hare. However, these matters I did not hear from the people. Such secret things are not discussed upon the streets. All that I heard in Pithom may be talked openly over Egypt.

"The man and the woman laid their plans, and they were these: Last night, the man and his servants were to lie at Pithom, and to-day they were to meet thee at the temple of Bast, overpower thee, take thy treasure and, with the woman, fly to some secure place. With the treasure they were to hire them soldiers—mercenaries, and take arms against the king, thy father."

The speaker paused again. Seti's breast labored and his gaze was fixed upon the Hebrew.

"The ire of Jambres was kindled against the plotters, and he called an assembly of the priests within short distances from the village of image-makers and laid his discoveries before them. They pledged themselves to proceed to Pithom last night, which was the night they came together in council, and take the traitors. But one among their number, a young priest who knew the woman, played them false, entered the city before his fellows and warned the plotters. They had fled, with the priests in pursuit.

"My son, the man was Siptah, son of Amon-meses; the woman, the Princess Ta-user."

The prince's face took on an insane beauty. In each cheek was a scarlet stain—his lips smiled without parting and his eyes glittered. He did not question the Hebrew's story. Something within him corroborated every word. He sprang to his feet and with an unnatural laugh flung his hand above his head.

"Now, by Horus," he cried, "I must get back to Tanis. I would ask the pardon of Rameses!"

Aaron arose and laid detaining hands upon him.

"I did not tell thee this, that I might be a bearer of evil tidings. I came forth to meet thee, that thou mayest save thyself. Far be it from me to bring misfortune upon Israel's one friend in Egypt's high places. Return to Tanis with all speed and take the treasure with thee. Then only will the intent rest against thee—"

"Not so," Seti interrupted harshly. "Wilt thou rob me of the one balm to my humiliation? Wilt thou defeat me also in the one good deed I would do? Take thou the treasure and be glad that it fell not into the hands of the wanton. Let me depart."

But Aaron was planted in his way.

"Knowest thou not what they will do with thee? Thou wouldst have given aid to the enemy of Egypt. Thou knowest the penalty. Sooner would Israel make it a garment of sackcloth and feed upon alms, than yield thee up to thine enemies for thy gold's sake—"

But Seti would not hear him. "I care not what they do with me," he said. "The gods grant they lay upon me the extreme weight of the law. I go back to Tanis as one returneth to his beloved."

He shook off the Israelite's hands and ran into the open. There, he ordered the black to give the treasure over to the Hebrew, and flinging himself upon his horse, galloped furiously toward Tanis.

Of the remainder of the day Seti had little memory. Once or twice as he proceeded headlong through hamlets, he caught from the lips of natives a denunciation of Siptah, a vicious epithet applied to Ta-user, or, like a fresh thrust in an old wound, a pitying groan for himself. His shame had preceded him on fleet wings. He hoped he might as swiftly run his sentence down.

None knew him in the roadways and the towns did not expect him. The pickets on the outer wall of Tanis halted him, but when they beheld his face, their pikes fell and with hands on knees, they bade him pass. The palace sentries started and gave him room.

He was running, sobbing, through the dark and capacious corridors of the palace and no man had stayed him yet. Were they to make his shame more poignant by pitying him and punishing him not at all? He flung himself through the doors of the council chamber and halted.

The great hall was crowded and full of excitement. Meneptah had summoned the court to the royal presence.

In his loft above the throng stood the king, purple with rage. The queen, in her place at his side, was staying his outstretched hand. Below at his right stood Rameses, the kingliest presence that ever graced a royal sitting. At the left of Meneptah, was Har-hat, complacent and serene.

Out in the center of a generous space stood Moses. The great Hebrew was alone and isolated, but his

personality was such that a throng could not have obscured him.

In his massive physique was an insistent suggestion of immovability and superhuman strength; in the shape of his imperial head, there was illimitable capacity; in his face, the image of a nature commanding the entire range of feeling, from the finest to the fiercest. There was nothing of the occult in his atmosphere. His intense human force would have commanded, though Egypt had not known him as the emissary of God.

As it was, when he moved the assembly swayed back as if blown by a wind. A motion of his hand sent a nervous start over the hall. The nearest courtiers seemed prepared to crouch. Meneptah did not win a glance from his court. Every eye, wide and expectant, was fixed upon the Israelite.

The pale and troubled queen strove in vain. Meneptah thrust her aside and shaking his clenched hand at the solitary figure before him, ended the audience in a voice violent with fury.

"Get thee from me! Take heed to thyself; see my face no more. For in that day thou seest my face, thou shalt die!"

After the speech, the silence fell, deepened, grew ominous. None breathed, and the overwrought nerves of the court reached the limit of endurance.

Then Moses answered. His tones were quiet, his voice full of a calm more terrifying than an outburst had been.

"Thou hast spoken well," he said. "I will see thy face no more."

Another breathless silence and he turned, the courtiers shrinking from his way, and passed out of the hall.

At the doors, his eyes fell upon Seti. He made no sign of surprise. Indeed his glance seemed to indicate that he expected the prince. He raised his hand and extended it for a moment over the boy's head, and went forth.

The strength went from Seti's limbs, the passion from his brain, and when Rameses with grim purpose in his face beckoned him, he obeyed meekly and prostrated himself before the angry king.

CHAPTER XXXIX

BEFORE EGYPT'S THRONE

The distance by highway between Memphis and Tanis was eighty miles, a little more than two days' journey by horseback.

Masanath had required two weeks to accomplish that distance. She refused to travel except in the cool of the morning and of the afternoon; if she felt the fatigue of an hour's journey, she rested a day at the next town; she consulted astrologers, and moved forward only under propitious signs; she insisted on following the Nile until she was opposite Tanis, instead of taking the highway at On and continuing across the Delta.

The most of her following walked, and she proceeded at the pace of her plodding servants.

She spoke of her freedom as though she went to meet doom; she gazed on the sorry fields and pastures of Egypt as though the four walls of a prison were soon to shut out heaven and earth from her eyes.

She was now within ten miles of Tanis, fourteen days after her departure from Memphis.

Four solemn Ethiopians bore her litter upon their shoulders, and another waved a fan of black ostrich plumes over her. The litter was of glittering ebony, hung with purple, tasseled with gold. At her right,

was Unas; at her left, Nari. Behind her were dusky attendants and sooty sumpter-mules.

Her robes were white, and very fine, but there was no henna on her nails, nor kohl beneath her lids, nor jewels in her hair. So she would prove that, though she was a coming queen, she was not glad of it. Hers was not the spirit that hides its trouble and enamels the exterior with false flushes and smiles. She enveloped herself in her feelings. She tinctured her voice with them; she made her eyes languid with them; and the touch of her hand, the curve of her lips and the droop of her head were eloquent of them.

By this time, she had despaired. There was yet an opportunity to spend another day covering the remaining ten miles, but she would loiter no longer. She was tired, of a truth.

It was near sunset when a company of royal guards, under Menes, rode up from the north.

The captain flung himself from his horse and hurried to Masanath's litter.

"Holy Isis! Lady Masanath," he exclaimed; "where in all Egypt hast thou hidden thyself these fourteen days? The whole army of the north hath been searching after thee, and Rameses hath raved like a madman since that day long past on which thou shouldst have arrived in Tanis."

"I have been on the way," she answered loftily. "The haste of the prince is unseemly. I would not fatigue myself nor court disaster by incautiousness, these perilous days."

Menes bowed. "I am reproved, and contrite. I forgot that I spoke with my queen. But I am most grateful that thou didst permit me to find thee, for

Rameses sent me forth an hour since, with the hard alternative of fetching thee to him or losing my head. But that he was sure of my success is proved by the litter he sent between two horses for thee. Wilt thou leave this and proceed in the other?"

Masanath answered by extending her hand to him.

Three of the soldiers laid their cloaks on the earth for her feet; six others let down the litter and Menes assisted her into the sumptuous conveyance Rameses had sent.

Another soldier, after rapid and low-spoken instructions from the captain, whirled his horse about, saluted and took the road toward Tanis at a gallop.

The six shouldered the litter of the crown princess-to-be, Menes mounted his horse and rode beside her; Unas, her Memphian train, and the riderless horses were left to bring up the rear, and Masanath continued to the capital.

"Perchance, thou hast been famished these fourteen days in the matter of court-gossip," the captain said. "Wherefore I am come as thy informant with such news as thou shouldst know. For, being ignorant of the infelicities in the household of the king, it may be that thou wouldst ask after the little prince, Seti, and wherefore the queen appears no more at the side of the Pharaoh, nor speaks with thy lord nor sees thy noble father; and furthermore, where Ta-user hath taken herself and other things which would embarrass thee to hear answered openly."

Masanath roused herself and prepared to listen. Serious words from the lips of the light-hearted captain were not common, and when he spoke in that manner it was time to take heed.

"I had heard of the little prince's misfortune and of the treason of Ta-user and her party, and the placing of a price upon her head; but nothing more hath come to mine ears. Is there more, of a truth?"

"Remember, I pray thee," the captain replied, riding near to her, "that I bring thee this for thine own sake—not for the love of tale-bearing. On the counsel of Rameses, this day the Pharaoh sentenced Seti to banishment for a year to the mines of Libya—"

"To the mines!" Masanath cried in horror.

"Not as a laborer. Nay, the sentence was not so harsh. But as a scribe to the governor over them."

"It matters little!" she declared indignantly. "The boy-prince—the poor, misguided young brother sent to a year of banishment—a lifelong humiliation! Libya, the death-country! Now, was anything more brutal? Nay, it is like Rameses!"

"Aye," the captain replied quickly, leaning over her with a cautioning motion of his hand. "Aye, and it is like thee to say it. But hear me yet further. The queen and the Son of Ptah have quarreled, violently, over Seti," he continued in a low tone. "The little prince merited thy father's disfavor, because Seti espoused the cause of Ta-user in thy place, though he loves thee, and for that—we can find no other reason—the noble Har-hat also urged the king into the harsh sentence of the little prince. For this the queen hath publicly turned her back upon the crown prince and the fan-bearer, and the atmosphere of the palace is most unhappy."

He lowered his voice to a whisper. "Hotep championed Seti,—for the young sister's sake, it would

appear,—but to me it seemeth that the scribe hath lost his wits."

"It would seem that he courteth a sentence to the mines likewise, and he needs but to go on as he hath begun to succeed most thoroughly. And it behooveth his friends to prevent him."

He took Masanath's hand and, leaning from the saddle, whispered:

"Ye are under the same roof—thou and Hotep. Avoid him as though he were a pestilence."

He straightened himself and drew his horse away from her so that she could not answer.

The captain's meaning, though obscure to any other that might have heard him, was very clear to Masanath. Har-hat was still holding a threat of Hotep's undoing over his daughter's head, lest, at the last moment, she rebel against her marriage. She trembled, realizing how desperately she was weighted with the safety of the scribe. Her fear for him brought the first feeling of willingness to wed with Rameses that she had ever experienced. Distasteful as marriage was to her, it was a species of sacrifice to be catalogued with the many self-abnegations of which womanhood is capable when the welfare of the beloved is at stake.

She sank back in the shadows of her litter, covered her face with her hands and shuddered because of the imminence of her trial.

So they journeyed on, till at last Masanath fell asleep—not from indifference, for her fears exhausted her—but because her mind still retained babyhood's way of comforting itself when too roughly beset.

She was aroused in the middle of the first watch by the passage of her litter between bewildering stretches of lights. She was within the palace. The soldiers that bore her were tramping over a Damascene carpet, and between long lines of groveling attendants, through an atmosphere of overwhelming perfume. The messenger had been swift and the court had had time to prepare to greet the coming crown princess with propriety.

After the first spasm of terror, Masanath set her teeth and prepared to endure. She was borne to the doors of the throne-room and two nobles gorgeously habited set the carved steps beside the litter for her feet.

Without hesitation she descended.

The great hall was ablaze with light and lined with courtiers. The Pharaoh, with the queen by his side again, was in his place under the canopy.

How tiny the little bride seemed to those gathered to greet her! In that vast chamber, with its remote ceiling, its majestic pillars, its distances and sonorous echoes, her littleness was pathetically accentuated.

Outside the shelter of her litter, she felt stripped of all protection. She dared not look at the ranks of courtiers, lest her gaze fall on the fair face of the royal scribe. She reminded Isis of her threat and moved into the open space, which extended down the center of the hall.

Har-hat, glittering with gems, and rustling in snow-white robes, approached with triumph in his face to embrace her. But within three steps he paused as suddenly as though he had been commanded. Masanath had not spoken, but her pretty chin had risen, her

mouth curved haughtily, and the gaze she fixed upon him from under her lashes was cold and forbidding.

She extended the tips of her fingers to him. The action clamored its meaning. Not in the face of that assembly dared he disregard it, but his black eyes hardened and flashed threateningly. The warning given, he bent his knee and kissed the proffered hand. He had become the subject of his daughter.

She suffered him to lead her to the royal dais where she knelt. The queen descended, raised her and led her to the throne. Meneptah met them, kissed Masanath's forehead, and blessed her. The queen embraced her and returned to her place beside the Pharaoh.

Masanath turned to the right of the royal dais and faced the prince. Thus far, her greetings had not been hard. Now was the supreme test. Har-hat conducted her within a few paces of the prince and stepped aside. What followed was to prove Masanath's willingness.

Rameses stood in the center of a slightly raised platform, which was carpeted with gold-edged purple. Behind him was his great chair. But for the badge of princehood, the fringed ribbon dependent from a gem-crusted annulet over each temple, his habiliments were the same as the Pharaoh's.

Masanath gave him a single comprehensive glance. She was to wed against her will, but she noted philosophically that she was to wed with no puppet, but a kingly king. With all that, admitting herself a peer to this man, it wrenched her sorely to acknowledge subserviency to him.

Hope dead—the hour of her trial at hand—nothing was left to uphold her but the memory of the good

she might do for Hotep. Her face fell and she approached the prince with slow steps. Within three paces of the platform she paused and sank to her knees.

It was done. She had acknowledged the betrothal and knelt to her lord. Somewhere in that assembly Hotep had seen it, and she wondered numbly if he understood why she had submitted; wondered if she had saved him; wondered if she could endure for the long life they must spend under the same roof; wondered if the gods would take pity on her and kill her very soon.

By this time, Rameses had raised her. He lifted the badge of princehood from his forehead, shortened the fillet from which it hung, so that it would fit her small head and set it on her brow.

The great palace shook with the acclaim of the courtiers. Organ-throated trumpets were blown; the clang of crossed arms, and sound of beaten shields arose from all parts of the king's house; all the ancients' manifestations of joy were made,—and the pair that had brought it forth looked upon each other.

Masanath was trembling, and filled with a great desire to cry out. All this was manifest on her small, white face. The light had died in the prince's eyes, the exultation was gone from his countenance. He knew what thoughts were uppermost in the mind of Masanath, and the tyrant had spoken truly to her long ago, when he said his heart might be hurt. His brow contracted with an expression of actual pain and he turned with a fierce movement as if to command the rejoicings to be still. But a thought deterred him and taking Masanath's hand he led her

down the hall through the bending ranks of purple-wearing Egyptians to the great portals of the hall. There, he gave her into the hands of a troop of court-ladies, lithe as leopards and gorgeous as butterflies, who led her with many sinuous obeisances to her apartments. She had not far to go. The suite given over to the new crown princess was within the wing of the palace in which the royal family lived. Masanath noted with a little trepidation that her door was very near to the portals over which was the winged sun, carven and portentous. Here were the chambers of her lord, the heir.

Within her own apartments, she was attended multitudinously. Ladies-in-waiting bent at her elbow; soft-fingered daughters of nobility habited her in purple-edged robes; flitting apparitions, in a distant chamber, glimpsed through a vista, laid a table of viands for her, to which she was led with many soft flatteries; her every wish was anticipated; all her trepidation conspicuously overlooked; her rank religiously observed in all speech and behavior. And of all her retinue, she was the least complacent.

After her sumptuous meal, she was informed that a member of her private train had come to Tanis from Memphis, ten days agone, in a state of great concern and had awaited all that time in the palace till she should arrive. Now that she had come, the servitor insisted on seeing the princess and would not be denied. Troubled and wondering, Masanath ordered that he be brought. In a few minutes, Pepi stood before her. The taciturn servant was visibly frightened.

"Pepi!" she cried. "What brings thee here?"

"I have lost the Israelite," he faltered.

"Thou hast lost Rachel!"

"Hear me, my Lady, I pray thee. Thou knowest we were to stop at the Marsh of the Discontented Soul to leave a writing on the tomb for the son of Mentu. So we did. The Israelite bade me stand away from the shore lest we be seen. I put out into midstream and while mine eyes were attracted for a space toward the other shore, a boat drew up at the Marsh. I started to return, but before I could reach the place, the Israelite—the man—they were in—each other's arms."

Masanath clasped her hands happily, but the servant went on, in haste. "It was the son of Mentu, I know, my Lady. He was wondrous tall, and the Israelite was glad to see him—"

"O, of a surety it was Kenkenes," Masanath interrupted eagerly.

"Nay, but hear me, my Lady," the serving-man protested, his distress evident in his voice. "I moved away and turned my back, for I knew they had no need of me. Once, twice, I looked and still they talked together. But, alas! the third time I looked, it was because I heard sounds of combat, and I saw that the son of Mentu and several men were fighting. One, whom by his fat figure I took to be Unas, was pursuing the Israelite. I would have returned to help her, but the dreadful night overtook me before I could reach her—and as thou knowest,—none moved thereafter.

"When the darkness lifted, I was off the wharves at On, where my boat had drifted. I halted only long enough to feed, for I was famished, and with all haste I returned to the Marsh. None was there. I went to

the house in Memphis, but it was dark and closed. Next I visited the home of Mentu and asked if Rachel were there, but the old housekeeper had never heard of such a maiden. But when I asked if the young master had returned, she asked me where I had been that I had not heard he was dead. And having said, she shut the door in my face. I think he was within, and she would not answer me 'aye' or 'nay,' but I know that she told the truth concerning the Israelite."

Masanath, who had stood, the picture of dismay and apprehension during the last part of the recital, seized his arm.

"Hast thou had an eye to the master?" she demanded in a fierce whisper.

"Aye," he answered quickly. "I have followed him like a shadow, and this I know. Nak and Hebset were here when I came, but they went that same night, each in a different direction, to search further for her. They returned to-night, but I know not whether they brought one with them."

Masanath clasped her hands and thought for a moment, a mental struggle evidenced on her little face by the rapid fluctuations of color.

"Get thee down to the kitchens, Pepi," she said presently, "and if Nari hath come, send her up to me. Give thyself comfort and remain in the palace. It may be that I shall need thee."

She surveyed herself with a swift glance in a plate of polished silver which was her mirror, and then, darting out of her door, ran down the corridor as though she would outstrip repentance before it overtook her.

The flight was not long, but she had lost her com-

posure before she started. Outside her doors, she trembled as if unprotected. Soldiers of the royal guard paced along the hall before her chambers. The lamps that burned there were of gold; the drapings were of purple wrought with the royal symbols; the asp supported the censers; the head of Athor surmounted the columns. She was a dweller of the royal house. Far, far away from her were the unimperial quarters in which, once, she would have lived. There was her father—there was Hotep—

She came upon him whom she sought. He was on the point of entering his apartments. He paused with his hands on the curtains and waited for her.

"A word with thee, my Lord," she panted, chiefly from trepidation.

"I have come to expect no more than a word from thee," he said.

The answer would have sent her away in dudgeon, under any other circumstances, but her pride could not stand in the way of this very pressing duty.

"A boon," she said, choking back her resentment.

"A boon! Thou wouldst ask a boon of me! Nay, I will not promise, for it may be thou comest to ask thy freedom, and that I will not grant for spleen."

Still she curbed herself. "Nay, O Prince; I am come to ask naught of thee which—a wife—may not justly ask of—her—lord."

He left the curtain and came close to her. "Had the words come smoothly over thy lips, they would have meant any wife—any husband. But thy very faltering names thee and me. What is the boon that thou mayest justly ask of me?"

"My father—."

"Hold! There, too, I make a restriction. Already have I suffered thy father sufficiently."

Tears leaped into her insulted eyes, and in the bright light, shining from a lamp above her head, her emotion was very apparent.

"Thou hast begun well in thy siege of my heart, Rameses," she said. "I am like to love thee, if thou dost woo me with affronts!"

"I am as like to win thee with rough words as I am with soft speeches. I had thought thee above pretense, Masanath."

"I pretend not," she cried, stamping her foot. "And if thou wouldst know how I esteem thee, I can tell thee most truthfully."

He laughed and caught her hands. "Nay, save thy judgment. Thou hast a long life with me before thee, and the minds of women can change in the blink of an eye. Furthermore, I love thee none the less because thou art so untamed. Thou art the world I would subdue. So thou dost not give allegiance to another conqueror, I shall not grieve over thy rebellion. Is there another?" he asked.

"I would liefer wed with well-nigh any other man in Egypt than with thee, Rameses," she replied deliberately.

The declaration swept him off his feet.

"Gods! but thou dost hate me," he cried. Panic possessed her for a moment, remembering Hotep, but it was too late. She returned the prince's gaze without wavering, though her hands shook pitifully. After what seemed to her an interminable time, he spoke again.

"Perchance I am unwise in taking thee," he said. "Perchance I but give thee opportunity to spit me on a dagger in my sleep."

The tears brimmed over her lashes this time.

"Thou dost slander me!" she exclaimed passionately.

"Then I do not understand thee, Masanath," he asserted.

"Of a surety," she declared, withdrawing a hand that she might dry the evidences of her indignation from her cheeks. "Take the example home to thyself! Thou hast been loved in thy time, and if ever there was awakened any feeling in thy heart in response it was repugnance. What if one of these women had it in her power to take thee against thy will? By this time thou hadst been dead of thy frantic hate of her, if self-murder had not been done!"

"Even so," he answered with a short laugh; "but I will not set thee free, Masanath, if thou didst convict me a monster in mine own eyes. If thou art good thou wilt love me or do thy duty by me. If thou art base, I have wedded mine own deserts."

He took the hand she had withdrawn and prepared to go on, but she interposed.

"Not yet have I asked my boon."

"I am no longer in debt to thy father."

"I ask no favor for my father at thy hands. Rather am I come to crave a boon for myself."

"Speak."

"My father asked an Israelite maiden at the hands of the Pharaoh a year agone, and she was beloved by my friend and thine. She fled from my father and was hidden by the man she loved—"

"Aye, I know the story. Hotep brought it to mine ears months ago. The man was Kenkenes, and thy father overtook him and threw him into prison in Tape. What more?"

"The gods keep me in my love for thee, O my father! for thou dost strain it most heavily," Masanath thought. After an unhappy silence she went on.

"Thou hast given me news. I know little of the tale save that the day the darkness fell Kenkenes met his love on the eastern shore of the Nile opposite Memphis, and there my father's servants came upon them and fought with him for the possession of the Israelite. The Israelite is gone, and my father's servants are still seeking for her, and I would not have her taken."

"Thou art a queen. What is she, a slave, to thee?"

"A sister, my comforter, my one friend!"

"Thou canst find sisters and comforters and friends among high-born women of Egypt. I had laid Kenkenes' folly concerning this Israelite to the moonshine genius in him. But the slave is a sorceress, for the madness touches whosoever looks upon her. Behold her worshipers—first, thy father, Kenkenes, Hotep and thyself, and the gods know whom else. She would better be curbed before she bewitches Egypt."

"It is her goodness and her grace that win, Rameses. If that be sorcery, let it prevail the world over. Give her freedom and save her spotlessness."

"Har-hat shall not take her, I promise thee. I shall send her back to her place in the brick-fields."

Masanath recoiled in horror. "To the brick-fields!" she cried. "Rachel to the brick-fields!"

"I have said. Her Israelitish spotlessness will be

secure there, and the reduction of her charms will be the saving of Kenkenes."

"Alas! what have I done?" she cried. "I am as fit for the brick-fields as Rachel. O, if thou but knew her, Rameses!"

"Nay, it is as well that I do not; she might bewitch me. And seeing that she is born of slaves, how shall she be pampered above her parents? Put the folly from thy mind, Masanath, and trouble me not concerning a single slave. Shall I let one go, seeing that I am holding the body at the sacrifice of Egypt?"

Great was Masanath's distress to make her seize him so beseechingly.

"Turn not away, my Lord," she begged. "See what havoc I have wrought for Rachel when I sought to help her. And behold the honesty of thy boast of love for me. My first boon and thou dost deny it!"

He laughed, and slipping an arm about her, pressed her to him.

"First am I a king—next a lover," he said. "Thy prayer seeketh to come between me and my rule over the Israelites. Ask for something which hath naught to do with my scepter."

"Surely if thou sendest her to the brick-fields Kenkenes will go into slavery with her," she persisted, enduring his clasp in the hope that he might soften.

"Then it were time for the dreamer to be awakened by his prince."

"Thou wilt not come between them!" she exclaimed.

"Nay, no need. Seven days of the lash and the sun of the slave-world will heal Kenkenes."

"Thou shalt see!" Masanath declared, endeavoring to free herself. "And the gods judge thee for thy savage use of maidenhood!"

Again he laughed, and this time he kissed her in spite of her resistance.

"The gods judge me rather for this sweeter use of maidenhood," he said. "Let them continue to prosper me in it and hasten the day of her willingness. Meanwhile," he continued, still holding her, as if he enjoyed the mastery over her, "get thee back to thy sleep and put the thought of slaves out of thy mind. To-morrow thou settest thy feet in the path to the throne; to-morrow there will be ceremonies and prayers and blessings out of number; and to-morrow sunset thou art no longer betrothed but a bride! My bride! Go now, and be proud of me if thou canst not love me!"

He released her and, as he entered his apartments, lifted the curtain and stood for an instant looking back at her.

Masanath saw him through her despairing tears—strong, immovable, terrible—in his youth and his purposes and his capabilities.

Then the curtain fell behind him.

Crushed and stunned with despair and horror, she made her way to her apartments in a mist of tears.

There was no help for the beloved Rachel or for the young lover. All whom she might ask to approach the king in their favor were helpless or prejudiced. Seti was disgraced; the queen, useless; Hotep, already too imminently imperiled; Rameses, Har-hat, against the lovers; and the king—the poor, feeble king, hopelessly beyond any appeal that she might direct to him.

A sorry resolve shaped itself in her mind. To-morrow at dawn she also would put forth searchers, and finding Rachel, send her out of Egypt, and Kenkenes after her.

CHAPTER XL

THE FIRST-BORN

At the door of her apartments Masanath was met by the faithful Nari, who drew her within and showed her triumphantly that the usurping ladies-in-waiting had departed. The unhappy girl was grateful for the change. The relief for her sorrow was its expression, and she dreaded the restraint put upon her by the presence of discerning and unfamiliar eyes.

All desire for sleep had left her. Nari, weary and heavy-headed, begged her to retire, but she would not. So at last the waiting woman, at her mistress' command, lay down and slept.

The apartment consisted of two chambers running the width of the palace. The outer chamber had a window opening on the streets of Tanis, the inner looked into the palace courtyard.

Masanath wrapped a woolen mantle about her and sat at the window overlooking the park.

Without was the wide hollow, walled by the many-galleried stories of the king's house. Below a fountain of running water, issuing from an ibis-bill of bronze, and falling into a pool, purled and splashed and talked on and on to itself.

Above, the mighty constellations were dropping slowly down the west. The wild north wind from the

sea strove against her cheek. The gods were too absorbed in great things, the shifting of the heavens, the flight of the wind and the rocking of the waters, to care for her great burden of trouble. Or, indeed, were they not prejudiced against her as all the world was? They had heard every prayer but hers. They had harkened to Rameses when he asked for her at their hands; they had harkened to her father and yielded him power at her sacrifice; they had even pitied Rachel; they had returned her love from Amenti, and yet had not Rachel reviled them? Nay, there was conspiracy laid against her by the Pantheon, and what had she done to deserve it?

In some one of the many windows that looked into the court another dragged at his chestnut locks and execrated gods and men because of their hardness of heart.

So the night wore on to its noon.

Masanath was becoming drowsy in spite of her determination to keep a sleepless vigil until dawn, when she was aroused by a commotion in the vicinity of the palace. There were indoor cries and shouts for help.

"A brawl," she thought. But the noise seemed to emerge into the street, and there came the sound of flying footsteps and frantic knocks upon doors without. The sound seemed to swell and spread abroad, widening and heightening. Wild shrieks and husky broken shouts swept up from all quarters of the town, and the whole air was full of a vast murmur of many voices, calling and wailing, excited, tremulous and full of fear.

Masanath passed into the outer room to the window that looked upon the city.

Every house had a light, which flickered and appeared at this window and that, and the streets were full of flying messengers, who cried out as they ran. Now and then a chariot, drawn at full speed, dashed past, and by the fluttering robes of the occupants Masanath guessed them to be physicians. All Tanis was in uproar, and its alarm possessed her at once.

She turned to awaken Nari, when she heard inside the palace excited words and hurrying feet. Some one ran, barefoot, past her door, calling under his breath upon the gods. At that moment an incisive shriek cut the increasing murmur in the palace and died away in a long shuddering wail of grief.

"Awake, awake, Nari!" Masanath cried, shaking the sleeping woman. "Something has befallen the city. It is in the palace and everywhere."

Meanwhile a chorus of screams smote upon her ears and the wild outcries of men filled the great palace with terrifying clamor.

Masanath, shaking with dread, wrung her hands and wept. Nari, stupid with fear, sat up and listened.

Presently some one came running and beat, with frenzied hands, upon the door.

"Open! Open! In the name of Osiris!" cried a voice which, though it quaked with consternation, Masanath recognized as her father's.

She flew to the door and wrenched it open. Har-hat, half-dressed, stood before it.

"Father, what manner of sending is this?" she cried.

"Death!" he panted. "Come with me!" He caught her arm and ran, dragging her after him down the corridor, half-lighted, but murmurous with sound.

"What is it, father?" she begged as he hurried her on.

"The gods only know. Rameses hath been smitten and is dying, or even now is dead!"

"Rameses!" she breathed in a terrified whisper. "Rameses! And an hour ago I talked with him—so strong, so resolute, so full of life—O Holy Isis!"

"It is a pestilence sent by Mesu. The whole city is afflicted. Ptah shield us!"

The hangings that covered the entrance to each suite of chambers had been thrown aside and the interiors were vacant. But the farther end of the hall was filled with terrified courtiers in all attitudes and degrees of extravagant demonstration of grief. Men and women were fallen here and there on the pavement or supporting themselves by pillar and wall, wailing, tearing their hair, wounding their faces, rending their garments.

All the dwellers of the palace were flocked about the apartments of Rameses. From the entrance into these chambers issued sounds of the wildest nature. Masanath heard and attempted to draw away from the fan-bearer.

"Take me not into that awful place!" she pleaded. "How canst thou force me, my father!"

But Har-hat did not seem to hear and pushed his way, still dragging her through the crush of shaking attendants that crowded into the outer chambers.

The sleeping-room of the heir was the focal spot of violent sorrow.

The royal pair, the king's ministers, the immediate companions of Rameses, the high priest from the

Rameside temple to Set at Tanis and a corps of leeches were present. The couch was surrounded.

Seti was not present, for only in the last moment had some one realized that the young prince should be brought. Hotep had gone to conduct him to the chamber.

The queen, inert and lifeless, lay on the floor at the foot of the prince's bed. Most of the physicians bent over her. Her women, chiefly the wives of the ministers, were hysterical and helpless.

But it was Meneptah who froze the hearts of his courtiers with horror.

Because of his obstinacy Egypt had gone down into famine, pestilence and destruction. Without more than ordinary concern he had watched the hand of the scourge pursue it into ruin till what time he should relent, and he had not relented.

But now that dread Hand had entered within the boundaries of his loves and had smitten Rameses, his heir, his idol!

The effect upon him was terrible. The death chamber rang like a torture dungeon. Nechutes and Menes, by united efforts, barely prevented him from doing self-murder. The earnest attempts of the priest to quiet him were totally useless. Nothing could have been more shocking.

The violent scene wrought Masanath's already overstrained nerves to the highest pitch of distress. The blood congealed in her veins and her steps lagged, but Har-hat, for some purpose not apparent to any who looked upon his daughter's anguish, drew her to the very side of the couch. The leeches, who had been

vainly seeking for some flicker of life, stepped aside and the eyes of the cowering girl fell on the prince.

Rameses had seen the Hand that smote him.

The look on the frozen features completed the undoing of Masanath's self-control and she collapsed beside the bed, utterly prostrated.

Hotep entered with Seti. The boy prince's face was inflamed with much weeping, and he flung himself upon the cold clay of Rameses, forgetting wholly that the older brother had urged the passage of a harsh sentence upon his young head.

The courtiers, who had stoically witnessed Meneptah's frantic grief, turned now and hid their blinded eyes. Hotep went to the Pharaoh and laid his hand on the monarch's shoulder. The action commanded. Exhausted by his frenzy, Meneptah leaned against his scribe. The cup-bearer and the captain released him and Hotep spoke quietly.

"Seest thou, O my King, the sorrow of thy people? Behold thy young son and pity him. Look upon thy queen and comfort her. If thou, their staff, art broken, who shall bear them up in their sorrow? Break not. Be thou as the strong father of thy great son, so that from the bosom of Osiris he may look upon Egypt and sleep well, seeing that in his loss his kingdom lost not her prop and stay, her king, also."

The scanty manhood of the monarch, thus ably invoked, responded somewhat. He raised himself and permitted Hotep to conduct him to the side of the boy prince. Seti fell down at his father's feet, and Hotep took Meneptah's hand and laid it on the bowed head.

"Thou dost pardon him, O Son of Ptah," the scribe

said in the same quiet voice. The king nodded weakly and wept afresh. After the prince had clasped his father's knees and covered the hand with kisses, he obeyed the scribe's sign and went away to his mother's side. Again Hotep, compelling by his low voice, spoke to the king and the assembly listened.

"The gods have not limited the darts of affliction to thee, O Son of Ptah. Rameses journeyed not alone into Amenti. He took a kingdom with him. Behold, the Hebrew hath loosed his direst plague upon Egypt, and by the lips of an Israelite, in the streets, every first-born in thy realm perished in the home of his father this night!"

The entire assembly cried out, and most of them ran sobbing and praying from the chamber. Instantly the outcry and clamor in the palace broke forth again, for the inhabitants knew that the blow which had smitten Rameses had fallen on one of their own.

Meneptah staggered away from Hotep, his frenzy upon him again.

"Send them hither," he cried hoarsely, waving his arms toward a white-faced courtier that had stood his ground. "Send them hither—the Hebrews, Mesu and Aaron! Israel shall depart, before they make me sink the world! For they have sent madness upon me! I condemned my gentle son, I punished those who gave me wise counsel, I have ruined Egypt, I have slain mine heir, and now the blood of the first-born of all my kingdom is upon my head!" His voice rose to a shriek, and Hotep, putting an arm about him, hushed him with gentle authority and signed the courtier to obey.

The physicians lifted the queen and bore her away. Seti stopped at Masanath's side and looked at her with compassion in his eyes. Har-hat came to him.

"Seeing that thou hast won the pardon of thy father, am I not also included in the restoration of good feeling? Have I won thine enmity, my Prince?"

"I hold naught against thee, O Har-hat, but thou hast not been a profitable counselor to my father in these days of his great need." The young prince spoke frankly and returned the comprehending gaze of the fan-bearer. Har-hat's eyes fell on his daughter, and again on the prince. Slow discomfiture overspread his features. Rameses was dead and with him died the fan-bearer's hold upon his position. Seti was arisen in the heir's place, with all the heir's enmity to him. But from Seti he could not purchase security with Masanath.

Hotep supported Meneptah out of the death chamber, for the court paraschites were already hiding in the shadows of the great halls without. The bed-chamber slowly emptied. Har-hat lifted Masanath and followed the last out-going courtier.

Another tumult had arisen in the great corridor, an uproar of another nature that advanced from the entrance hall of the palace. There were cries of supplication, persuasion, urging, that were frantic in their earnestness. The whole palace seemed to be on its knees.

Hotep, with the king, had paused, and several courtiers went before him and looked down the cross corridor. Instantly they fell on their knees, crying out:

"Ye have the leave of the powers of Egypt! Go!

Make haste! Take your flocks, all that is yours! Aye, strip us even, if ye will! But let not the sun rise upon you in Egypt! For we be all dead men!"

A murmur ran through the ministers. "The Hebrews!"

They came slowly, side by side, the two brothers. Egyptians in all attitudes of entreaty cumbered their path—Egyptians, born to the purple, rich, proud, powerful, on their faces to enslaved Israel!

Meneptah wrenched himself from Hotep's sustaining arms and, staggering forward, all but on his knees, met them.

"Rise up and get you forth from among my people," he besought them, "both ye and the children of Israel, and go and serve the Lord as ye have said. Also take your flocks and your herds as ye have said, and be gone; and bless me also!"

Great was the fall for a Pharaoh to pray a blessing from the hands of a slave; great was his humility to kneel to them. But there was no triumph, no exultation on the faces of the Hebrews. Aaron, with his bearded chin on his breast, looked down on the head of the shuddering, pleading monarch; but Moses, after sad contemplation of the humbled king, raised his splendid head and gazed with kindling eyes at Har-hat.

Then with the words, "It is well," spoken without animation, he turned and, with his brother, disappeared into the dusk of the long corridor. The expression, the act, the mode of departure seemed to indicate that the Israelites doubted the stability of the king's intent. In a moment, therefore, the courtiers were pursuing the departing brothers, urging and praying with all their former wild insistence.

Har-hat put Masanath on her feet and started to leave her, but she flung her arms about his neck.

"Forgive me, my father," she sobbed. "For my rebellion the gods may absolve me, but I have been unfilial and for that there is no justification. If aught should befall thee in these awful days, how I should reproach myself! Sawest thou not the Hebrew's gaze upon thee? Say thou dost forgive me!"

"Nay, nay," he said hastily; "thou hast not done me to death by thine undutifulness. And the Hebrew fears me. Get back to thy chamber and rest." He kissed her and undid her clinging arms. Going to the king, he put aside Hotep, who was striving to raise the monarch, and lifted Meneptah in his arms.

"Masanath is better now, good Hotep, and I would take my place beside my king."

Without summoning further aid, he half carried the limp monarch up the hall and into the royal bed-chamber.

Weak, shaking, sated with horror and numb with fear, Masanath attempted to return to her apartments, but at the second step she reeled. Hotep saw her. The fan-bearer was not in sight. In an instant the scribe was beside the fainting girl, supporting her, nor did he release her until she was safe in the ministering arms of Nari.

As he was leaving her he commended her most solemnly to the gods.

"Death hath wrenched a scepter from the gods and ruled the world this night," he said. "We may not delude ourselves that we have escaped, my Lady. As sure as there is a first-born in thy father's house and in mine, that one is dead. And think of those others

whom we love, the eldest born of other houses! Do thou pray for us, thou perfect spirit. I can not, for there is little reverence for my gods in me this night."

He turned away and disappeared down the corridor.

Within her chamber Masanath knelt and dutifully strove to pray, but her petition resolved itself into a repeated cry for help. In that hour she did not think of the relief to her and to many that the death of Rameses had brought about, for in her heart she counted it sin to be glad of benefit wrought by the death of any man.

Through the fingers across her face she knew that dawn was breaking, but quiet had not settled on the city. Surging murmurs of unanimous sorrow rose and fell as if blown by the chill wind to and fro over Egypt. The nation crouched with her face in the dust. There was no perfunctory sorrow in her abasement. She was bowed down with her own woe, not Meneptah's. Never before had a prince's going-out been attended by such wild grief. There was no comfort in Egypt, and the air was tremulous with mourning from the first cataract to the sea.

CHAPTER XLI

THE ANGEL OF DEATH

Kenkenes had spent two weeks in Goshen in systematic search for Rachel.

The labor had been time-consuming and fruitless.

More than two million Israelites were encamped about Pa-Ramesu, and among this host Kenkenes had searched thoroughly and fearlessly. He was an Egyptian and a noble, and Israel did not make his way easy. But all Judah knew Rachel and loved her, and the first the young man came upon was a quarryman who had known of Rachel's flight from Har-hat and of her protection at the hands of an Egyptian. Therefore when Kenkenes bore witness, by his stature, that he was the protecting Egyptian, and by his testimony concerning the God of Israel, that he was worthy, this friendly son of Judah began to suspect that Rachel would be glad to see the young noble, and he joined Kenkenes in his search. Furthermore, he softened the hearts of the tribe toward the Egyptian and they tolerated him with some assumption of grace.

The other tribes gave him no heed except to glower at him in the camp-ways or to mutter after him when he had passed. Seeing that Judah suffered him, they did not fall on him. Thus the young man was safe. As for the notice Kenkenes took of Israel, it began

and ended with his inquiry after Rachel, the daughter of Maai the Compassionate, a son of Judah. His earnestness absorbed him. Otherwise he was but partly conscious of great preparations making in camp, of tremendous excitement, heightening of zeal and vast meetings after nightfall, when he had withdrawn to a far-off meadow to sleep in the grass.

When he had searched throughout the length and breadth of Israel and found Rachel not, he led his horse from the distant meadow, where he had been pastured, and turned his head toward Tanis.

While he was binding the saddle of sheep's wool about the Arab's narrow girth he was surprised to find that the friendly son of Judah had followed him to the pasture. The man approached, as though one spirit urged him and another held him back, and offered Kenkenes the shelter of his tent for the night.

Somewhat gratified and astonished, Kenkenes thanked him and declined. Still the Hebrew lingered and urged him with strange persistence. Kenkenes expressed his gratitude, but would not stay.

Having taken the road toward Tanis where Rachel might be in the hands of Har-hat, his heart seemed to turn to iron in his breast. All the energies and aims of his youth seemed to resolve into one grim and inexorable purpose.

It was far into the second watch when he left Pa-Ramesu. But the great city of tents was not yet sleeping.

The horse was anxious for a journey after a fortnight of idleness and he bade fair to keep pace with his rider's impatience. The Arabian hills had sunk below the sky-line and the Libyan desert was not

marked by any eminence. With Pa-Ramesu behind him, a wide unbroken horizon belted the dusky landscape. The lights winked out over Goshen and the hamlets were not visible except as Kenkenes came upon them. The shepherd dogs barked afar off, or now and then a wakened bird cheeped drowsily, or the waters in the canals rippled over a pebbly space.

But these sounds ceased unaccountably, at last, and a silence settled down till the atmosphere was tense with stillness. A deadening hand seemed to cover the night.

The silence roused Kenkenes and he realized the solemnity of the earth, the vastness of the sky and the majesty of the solitude. Mysteriously affected, he withdrew within himself and humbly acknowledged the One God.

At midnight a chill struck the breeze and he drew his mantle about him while he rode. The wind freshened and a heated counter-current from the desert met it and they whirled away, rustling through the grassy country.

The Arab reduced his gallop so suddenly that Kenkenes was jolted. The small peaked ears of the horse went up and he showed a disposition to move sidewise into the meadow growth beside the way.

"A wild beast hath taken the road," Kenkenes thought.

The horse brought up, with a start, his prominent muscles twitching, and sniffed the air strongly.

A high oscillation in the atmosphere descended on Kenkenes.

The Arab reared, snorting, and then crouched, quivering with wild terror in every limb.

Unconscious, even of the movement, Kenkenes threw up his arm as if to ward off the blow and bent upon his horse's neck.

Gust after gust of icy air swept down on his head, as if winnowed by frozen wings. Then with a backward waft, colder than any wind he had ever known, the hovering Presence passed.

Instantly the horse plunged and took the road toward Tanis as if stung by a lash. Kenkenes, shaken and full of solemn dread, did well to keep his saddle. He grasped the stout leather bridle with strong hands, but he might have curbed the hurricane as easily. The Arab stretched his gaunt length, running low, and the haunted night reëchoed with the sound of his hoofs. The land of Goshen lay east and west, with a slight divergence toward the north. The road to Tanis ran due north. It was not long until Kenkenes' flying steed brought him in sight of the un-Israelite Goshen. Illuminated windows starred the plain and the wind shrilling in Kenkenes' ears bore uncanny sounds. A turf-thatched hovel at the roadside showed a light as they swept by and a long scream clove the air, but the Arab was not to be halted.

The murmurous wind did not soothe him, and the wakeful night had a terror for him that he could not outrun. He veered sharply and galloped through the pastures to avoid a roadside hamlet that shrieked and moaned. He leaped irrigation canals and brush hedges, swept through fields and gardens, until, at last, by dint of persuasion, coupled with the animal's growing fatigue, Kenkenes succeeded in drawing the horse down into a milder pace.

The young man made no effort to fathom the mys-

terious visitation. Instead, he bowed his head and rode on, awed and humbled.

The night wore away and the gray of the morning showed him, strange-featured, the misty levels, meadows, fields and gardens of northern Goshen. The wind faltered and died; the stars, strewn down the east, paled and went out, one by one. Fragmentary clouds toward the sunrise became apparent, tinted, silvered and at last, like flakes of gold, scattered down to a point of intensest brilliance on the horizon. A lark sprang out of the wet, wind-mown grass of a meadow and shot up, up till it was lost in radiance and only a few of its exquisite notes filtered down to earth again.

A brazen rim showed redly on the horizon and the next instant the sun bounded above the sky-line.

It was the morning after the Passover, and Kenkenes, the son of Mentu, was the only Egyptian first-born that lived to see it break.

CHAPTER XLII

EXPATRIATION

At sunrise, Kenkenes drew up his horse and took counsel with himself. By steady riding he could reach Tanis shortly, but once within the capital of the Pharaoh, he was near to Har-hat and within reach of the fan-bearer's potent hand. When he entered the city he must be mentally and physically alert. He had not slept since the last daybreak, and he was weary and heavy-headed.

Ahead of him was a squat hamlet, set on the very border of Goshen. It was the same village that Seti had designated in his appointment with Moses. Here he might have found a hospitable roof and a pallet of matting, but the accompanying gratuity of curiosity and comment would have outweighed the small advantage of a bed indoors over a bed in the meadows.

He dismounted and, leading his horse some distance from the road, into the fringe of water-sprouts which lined the canal, picketed him within shade, out of view from the highway. Usually the meadow growth within reach of the seepage from the canals was most luxuriant, and here the flocks of the Israelites had come for sweet grass. They had kept the underbrush down, and the herbage closely cropped. But for two months Israel had been near Pa-Ramesu with its

cattle, and the canal-borders were again riotous with growth. The place Kenkenes came upon was most tempting, odorous and cool. He rolled his mantle for a pillow and flung himself into the grass, where he lay, half-buried in green, and slept.

The April sun, hot as a torrid July noon in northern lands, discovered the sleeper and stared into his upturned face. He flung his arm across his eyes and slept on. Shadows fell and lengthened; the afternoon passed, and still he slept.

Mounted couriers riding at a dead gallop, passed over the road, toward Tanis. Following them, war-chariots thundered by with a castanet accompaniment of jingling harness and jarring armor. Kenkenes stirred during the tumult, but when it had receded he lay still again. Three mounted soldiers leading a score of horses passed. The Arab in the copse whinnied softly. A second trio of soldiers, following with a smaller drove, heard the call from the bushes and drew up. The foremost man spoke to another, tossed the knotted bridles to him and, dismounting, came through the copse to the Arab. There he found the young nobleman, sleeping.

For a moment he hesitated, but no longer. Silently he untied the horse, led him forth, attached him with the others and speedily took the road toward Tanis.

After these had passed the road was deserted and no more came that way. In a little time the sun set. The wind from the north freshened and swayed the close-standing bushes so that their branches chafed one against another. At the sound Kenkenes, ready to wake, stirred and opened his eyes. After a moment

he sat up and looked for the Arab. The horse was gone.

Kenkenes arose and searched industriously. The trampled space in the road convinced him that the horse had departed with a number of others. Hoping that he might find some trace of the lost animal among the inhabitants, he went to the hamlet.

Two ragged lines of huts, built of sun-dried brick, formed a single straggling street. A low shed, the first building Kenkenes came upon, showed a flickering red light. A spare figure darted into it, just ahead of the young man.

From the threshold, the whole of the small interior was visible.

The light came from a small annealing oven. At a table, overlaid with a thin slab of stone, a man was modeling a cat in clay. On the opposite side of the room was a younger man, painting an image, preparatory to burning it in the oven. The walls were black with smoke, the floor strewn with broken images and dried crumbs of clay.

In the center of the room was the spare figure, in white robes. Kenkenes had opened his lips to speak when the conversation among the trio stopped him.

"Cowards! Dastards!" the spare man vociferated. "Is there not a patriot in Egypt? The Pharaoh in danger and not a man in the hamlet who will raise a heel to save him!"

"Holy Father," the short man protested, "the way is long, the horses have been required at our hands by the Pharaoh and were taken from us, and if there be evil omens, the king's sorcerers will discover them."

"King's sorcerers!" the spare man repeated indignantly. "There is not one of them who can tell a star from a fire-fly or read the events of yesterday! Horses! Must ye go mounted, in litters, in chariots, afraid of the harsh earth and a rough mile? In my youth, the young men went barefoot and traveled the desert for the joy of effort. Oh, for one of mine own best days! Horses!"

"Is the son of Hofa away?" the younger man asked. "He is a runner as well as a soldier."

The spare man broke out afresh.

"A runner! Aye, of a truth he is a runner. When the tidings came that the Pharaoh was to pursue the Israelites he ran his best—for the hay-fields—and is hidden safe under a swath somewhere—the craven!"

Kenkenes stepped into the shed.

"What is this concerning the Israelites?" he demanded.

The spare man turned and the two artisans gazed at the young sculptor with open mouths.

"The news is not to be cried abroad," the spare man replied shortly.

"Thou hast become cautious too late," Kenkenes retorted. "The most of thy talk have I heard. I would know the rest of it."

"By Bast, thou art imperious! In my great days the nobles groveled to me. Now, am I commanded by them. How thou art fallen, Jambres!

"The Israelites, my Lord," he continued mockingly, "departed out of the land of Goshen, in the early morning hours of this day, but the Pharaoh hath repented, and will pursue them—to turn them back, or

to destroy them." The old man's voice lost its sarcasm and became anxious.

"But the signs are ominous, the portents are evil. I know, I know, for I am no less a mystic because I have fallen from state. His seers are liars, they can not guide the king. He must not pursue them, for death shadows him the hour he leaves the gates of Tanis. He must not go! I love him yet, and I can not see him overthrown."

"Thou art no more eager to stay him than I," Kenkenes answered quickly. "Thou art in need of a runner. I am one."

The eye of the sorcerer fell on the young man's dress.

"A runner among the nobility?" he commented suspiciously.

"Is a man less likely to be a patriot because he is of blood, or less fleet of foot because he is noble?"

"Nay; nor less useful because he is sharp of tongue. Come with me!" Jambres seized his arm and, hurrying him out of the shed, went through the ragged street to the shrine at the upper end of the village.

From the tunnel-like entrance between the dwarf pylons a light was diffused as though it came through thin hangings. The pair entered the porch and passed into the sanctuary.

Entering his study, Jambres made his way to the heavy table and, fumbling about the compartments under it, drew forth a wrapped and addressed roll. Taking up a lighted lamp, he scrutinized the messenger sharply.

While he gazed, Kenkenes took the opportunity of

inspecting the priest. He had been a familiar figure about the palaces of two monarchs. For thirty years he had read the stars for the great Rameses, six for Meneptah, but he had measured rods with Moses and had fallen. From the pinnacle of power he had declined precipitately to the obscurest office in the priesthood. This bird-cote shrine was his.

"Art thou seasoned? Canst thou endure? Nay, no need to ask that," he answered himself, surveying the strong figure before him. "But who art thou?"

"I am the son of Mentu, the murket."

"The son of Mentu? Enough. If a drop of that man's blood runneth in thy veins, thou art as steadfast as death. Surely the gods are with me."

He opened a second compartment in the end of the table, but before he found what he sought he raised himself, suddenly.

"If thou art that son of the murket," he asked, "how is it thou art not dead?"

Kenkenes looked at him, wondering if the news of his supposed death had penetrated even to this little hamlet.

"Art thou not thy father's eldest born?" the priest asked further.

"His only child."

"What sheltered thee in last night's harvest of death?"

"Thou speakest in riddles, holy Father."

"Knowest thou not that every first-born in Egypt died last night at the Hebrew's sending?" the sorcerer demanded.

"The first-born of Egypt," Kenkenes repeated slowly. "At the Hebrew's sending?"

"Aye, by the sorcery of Mesu. Save for the eldest of Israel, there is no living first-born in Egypt to-day. From that most imperial Prince Rameses to the first-ling of the cowherd, they are dead!"

The young man heard him first with a chill of horror, half-unbelieving, barely comprehending. He was not of Israel and yet he had been spared. Then he remembered the dread presence above him in the night, —the chill from its noiseless wing. A light, instant and brilliant as a revelation, broke over him. Unconsciously, he raised his eyes and clasped his hands against his breast. He knew that his God had acknowledged him.

When his thoughts returned to earth, he found the glittering eyes of the sorcerer fixed upon him.

"Seeing that thou dost live, tell me what sheltered thee in this harvest of death?" Jambres repeated.

"The Lord God of Israel, who reaped it."

The answer was direct and fearless. To the astonished priest who heard it, it seemed triumphant.

Each of the many emotions the sorcerer experienced, displayed itself, in turn, on his face,—amazement, anger, censure, irresolution, distrust. After a silence, he took up the scroll and made as if to return it to its hiding-place in the compartments under the table.

"Stay," Kenkenes said, laying his hand on the sorcerer's. "Put it not away, for I shall carry it. Shall I, being a believer in Israel's God, be willing for the Pharaoh to pursue Israel?"

"Nay," Jambres replied bluntly; "but thou wouldst stay him for Israel's sake; I would prevent him for his own."

"So the same end is accomplished, wherefore quar-

rel over the motive? But when thou speakest of Israel's sake, which, by the testimony of past events, is now the more imperiled, Egypt or Israel?"

"Egypt! But it shall not be wholly overthrown through mine incautious trust of a messenger."

The young man still retained his hold on the sorcerer's hand.

"Thou dost impugn my fidelity. Now, consider this. I could have defeated thee and accomplished the Pharaoh's undoing by refusing to carry the message, by keeping silence in yonder shed of image-makers. Is it not so?"

Jambres assented.

"Even so. Instead, I offered and now I insist. Now, if thou deniest me, there is none to carry the warning and thou, thyself, hast undone the Pharaoh."

The sorcerer put away the hand and showed no sign of softening.

"Nay, then," Kenkenes said, "there is no need of the writing. I shall warn the king by word of mouth." He turned away and walked swiftly toward the portals of the shrine. Jambres beheld him recede into the dusk and wavered.

"Stay!" he called.

Kenkenes stopped.

"Wilt thou swear fidelity by the holy Name?"

"Aye, and by that holier Name of Jehovah, also."

He returned and faced the priest. "Thou art mystic, Father Jambres," he said persuasively; "what does thy heart tell thee of me?"

"The supplication of the need indorses thee, as it indorses any desperate chance. If thou art false, thou art the instrument of Set, whom the Hathors have

given to overthrow Egypt. If thou art true, the Pharaoh shall return safe to his capital in Memphis. The gratitude of Egypt will be sufficient reward."

"And I take the message?"

Jambres nodded. "Art thou armed?" he asked, bending again to look into the compartment he had opened.

"Except for my dagger, nay."

The sorcerer brought forth a falchion of that wondrous metal that could carve syenite granite and bite into porphyry; also, a pair of horse-hide sandals and a flat water-bottle.

"Put on these."

Kenkenes undid his cloak and untying his broidered sandals, wrapped them in his mantle and bound the roll, crosswise, on his back. Over this he slung the water-bottle, which the priest had filled in the meantime, fixed the falchion at his side and put on the horse-hide sandals.

"When hast thou broken thy fast?" the priest asked next.

"At sunset yesterday."

The priest turned with a sign to the young man to follow him and, passing through the shrine, led the way out of the sanctuary into the house of the sorcerer. Here, shortly, Kenkenes was served by a slave, with a haunch of gazelle-meat, lettuce, white bread and wine.

While he ate, the priest informed him of the situation he might expect to find at the end of his journey.

"The Israelites departed in the early hours of this morning taking the Wady Toomilat, east, toward the gates of the Rameside wall. It was the going forth of a multitude,—the exodus of a nation! And they

will travel at the pace of their slowest lambs. Thus Meneptah can gather his legions and make ready to pursue ere they have reached the wall." The priest had begun calmly, but the thought of pursuit excited him.

"He must not follow!" he continued. "They are unarmed, but the Pharaoh deals with a wizard and a strange God—no common foe. And if these were all who have evil intents against him, but there is another—another!"

He came to the young man's side, saying in an excited whisper:

"There is another, I say, within the king's affections—a scorpion cherished in his bosom!"

The old man's vehemence and his words fired Kenkenes. He arose and faced Jambres with kindling eyes. The sorcerer went on with increasing excitement.

"Better that his slaves depart increased, enriched threefold by Egypt, better that never again one stone be laid upon another, nor monument bear the king's name, than that Meneptah should leave the precincts of shelter! For his enemy would lead him outside the pale of protection, and there put him to death, and wear his crown after him!"

During this impetuous augury, the young man naturally searched after the identity of the offender. Not Ta-user, nor Siptah, nor Amon-meses, for the sorry tale of Seti and the outlawing of the trio had reached him at Pa-Ramesu. Furthermore, they had never had a place in the affections of the king. There was a new conspirator! At this point the blood heated and went charging through the young man's veins.

"If the king's enemy be mine enemy," he declared passionately, "thou hast this hour commissioned and armed that enemy's dearest foe! Name him."

The priest shook his head. His excitement had not carried him beyond the limits of caution.

"Save for my mystic knowledge, I have no proof against him, and if I balk him not and offend him, he hath a heavy and a vengeful hand."

"And thou hast not named him in the writing?"

Again the priest shook his head.

"Then," said the young man firmly, "then will I name him to the Pharaoh!"

Jambres looked at Kenkenes with profound admiration, not unmixed with apprehension.

"Let not thy youthful zeal undo thee," he cautioned. "Perchance thou dost mistake the man."

"The gods did not bestow all the art upon the mystics when they endowed thee with divining powers. They gifted every man with a little of it, and it speaketh no less truthfully because it is small. Come, thy board has been generous and I am satisfied. I have another and a fiercer hunger I would appease. Give me the message and let me be gone."

Silent, the priest led the way again into the sanctuary. Taking the scroll from its hiding-place once more he said, as he gave it into the messenger's hands: "Go first to Tanis, and if thou findest not the king in his capital, seek until thou dost find him. And have a care to thyself."

Kenkenes hesitated a moment, and said at last:

"It may be that I shall not return, but I would have my father know that I died not with the first-born. Wilt thou tell him, when thou canst?"

"The word shall go to him by sunset to-morrow if I carry it myself."

Kenkenes expressed his thanks and the priest went on.

"Be not rash, I charge thee. Farewell, and thy father's gods attend thee."

Without the dwarf pylons, Kenkenes bent for the old man's blessing and turned away. Walking rapidly to the northern limits of the town, he took the dusty highway again, and struck into an easy run.

The road sloped up toward the north, but the rise was gradual and the ascent was not wearying. The miles slipped behind swiftly, for he covered them as naturally as the unloitering bird traverses the air.

In two hours he had reached the pinnacle of the upland. To the north the road led continuously down to the sea. He paused and looked back over the long gentle declivity toward the south and west.

A sharp pain pierced him. In that moment, he realized that he was expatriated. After he had warned Meneptah, Egypt dropped out of his aims. Thereafter he had the rescue of Rachel, or her avenging to accomplish, and the results following upon the necessity of either of these alternatives would not permit him to return into the land of his fathers. There was no turning back now, nor any desire in him to do so. His conscience had been witness to the renunciation of his nation and his faith, and it did not chide him.

Still he stretched out his arms to the limitless, featureless, velvety dusk that was Egypt by day, and wept.

He entered Tanis in the middle of the third watch, and there he learned that the Pharaoh had departed,

but whither, the solemn, haggard citizens he met could not tell. He repaired to the inn, a house of mourning, also, and awaited the dawn. Then he looked on the funereal capital of Meneptah. The city no longer cried out; it sighed or sobbed, exhausted with its grief; it went the heavy round of labor demanded by the necessities of life, bowed, disheveled and blinded with woe. Kenkenes, humbled, sorrowful, and helpless, averted his eyes and hurried to the palace.

There he found that the queen and Seti, with all the queen's retinue, had departed on a pilgrimage to the temple of the sacred ram at Mendes for the welfare of the soul of Rameses. Masanath was in Pelusium mourning for her sister who died with the first-born. The others,—Har-hat, Hotep, Nechutes, Menes, Seneferu, Kephren the mohar,—all except the palace attendants had accompanied the king. The great house of the Pharaoh was empty, solitary and haunted.

The destination of the king was a state secret that had not been imparted to the chamberlains. Kenkenes returned into the unhappy streets again.

He went to the square in which the loiterers were congregated, even though there was one dead in the household, and seeking out the most intelligent, questioned him concerning the departure of the Pharaoh.

He learned that the king and the ministers had left Tanis, and driven south, the afternoon after the night of death. At nightfall, sixteen chariots from the nome followed him. And though the young man inquired of many sources in the capital, he discovered nothing further.

Avowedly, it was Meneptah's intent to overtake the Hebrews, turn them back, or destroy them. He could

not accomplish that thing with a score of ministers and sixteen picked chariots. It was evident that he meant to collect an army near the track of the Hebrews, and that he had departed for the rendezvous.

If the Israelites traveled but two miles an hour, they could cover the distance between Pa-Ramesu and the Rameside wall by the sunset of this, the second day after the death of the first-born. It would have been the first act of the Pharaoh to close the gates of the wall against them. The army of the north could gather from the remotest nomes by the close of this day also. Therefore, the hour to proceed against the Israelites was not far away. Kenkenes knew that he might not delay, even for a short sleep, in Tanis.

He fixed upon Pithom as the chosen spot for the rendezvous, since it was situated on the Wady Toomilat.

He refreshed himself with a beaker of sour wine in which a recuperative simple had been stirred, and took the road to the south.

Immediately outside of the city walls he came upon the track of the departing king, and followed it faithfully as long as there was light to show it to him. A dozen miles out of Tanis he ceased to run, and thereafter his progress became slower as his fatigue increased. Toward the end of the first watch, at the northern borders of the district known as Succoth, at the extreme east of Goshen, he came upon a mighty track.

Even in the dark he could see that a diaphanous gauze of dust overhung it and the air was heavy with the most volatile particles. The sandy earth had been ground and worked to the depth of over a foot. How

difficult had it been for the rearmost ranks to cover this ploughed soil! The track was a mile in width, and by the nature of the marks upon it, Kenkenes knew that husbandmen, not warriors, had passed over this spot. It was the path of Israel, leading east to the Rameside wall.

Kenkenes tightened his sandal straps and continued toward the south. Ahead of him, the horizon began to glow and then an edge,—a half,—all of a perfect moon lifted a vast orange disk above the world. At its first appearance it was sharply cut by a tower of the city of Pithom.

"Now, the God of Israel be thanked," he said to himself, "for another mile I can not cover."

The gates were tightly closed and a sentry from the wall challenged him.

"I bring a message to the Pharaoh," he answered.

"The Son of Ptah is not within the walls."

"Hath he departed," Kenkenes wearily asked, "or came he not hither?"

"He came not to Pithom."

"Come thou down, then, and let me in, friend, for I am spent."

In a little time, he entered the inn of the treasure city, was given a bed, upon which he flung himself without so much as loosening the kerchief on his head, and slept.

CHAPTER XLIII

"THE PHARAOH DREW NIGH"

In mid-afternoon of the following day, Kenkenes awoke and made ready to take up his search again. He was weary, listless and sore, but his mission urged him as if death threatened him.

The young man's athletic training had taught him how to recuperate. Most of the process was denied him now, because of his haste and the little time at his command, but the smallest part would be beneficial. He stepped into the streets of the treasure city, and paused again, till the recollection of the sorrow upon Egypt returned to him to explain the gloom over Pithom. The great melancholy of the land, attending him hauntingly, oppressed him with a sense of culpability. And he dared not ask himself wherein he deserved his good fortune above his countrymen, lest he seem to question the justice of the God of his adoption.

At a bazaar he purchased two pairs of horse-hide sandals, for the many miles on the roads had worn out the old and he needed foot-wear in reserve. From the booth he went straight to the baths, now wholly deserted; for when Egypt mourned, like all the East, she neglected her person..

When he came forth he was refreshed and stronger. Of the citizens, haggard and solemn as they had been

in Tanis, he asked concerning the Pharaoh. None had seen him, nor had he entered the city. The last one he questioned was a countryman from Goshen, and from him he learned that the army was assembling in a great pasture on the southern limits of the Israelitish country.

At sunset he was again upon the way, taking the level highway of the Wady Toomilat for a mile toward the west, and turning south, after that distance, as the rustic had directed him.

The road was good and he ran with old-time ease. At midnight he came upon the spot where the army had camped, but the Pharaoh had already moved against Israel. He had left his track. The great belt of disturbed earth wheeled to the south, and as far as Kenkenes could see there was the same luminous veil of dust overhanging it, that he had noted over the path of Israel.

The messenger drank deep at an irrigation canal, for he turned away from water when he followed the army, and leaving the level, dust-cushioned road behind, plunged into a rock-strewn, rolling land, desolate and silent. The growing light of the moon was his only advantage.

The region became savage, the trail of the army wound hither and thither to avoid sudden eminences or sudden hollows. Kenkenes dogged it faithfully, for it found the smoothest way, and, besides, the wild beasts had been frightened from the track of a multitude.

In the early hour of the morning, Kenkenes emerged from a high-walled valley with battlemented summits. Before him was the army encamped, and wild, indeed,

was the region chosen for the night's rest. The glistening soil was thickly strewn with rocks, varying in size from huge cubes to sharp shingle. Every abrupt ravine ahead was accentuated with profound shadow, and the dim horizon was broken with hills. The locality maintained an irregular slope toward the east. The camp stretched before the messenger for a mile, but the great army had changed its posture. It squatted like a tired beast.

Kenkenes approached it dropping with weariness, and after a time was passed through the lines and conducted to the headquarters of the king. In the center of the great field were pitched the multi-hued tents of Meneptah and his generals. Above them, turning like weather-vanes upon their staves, were the standards bearing the royal and divine device, the crown and the uplifted hands, the plumes and the god-head.

About the royal pavilion in triple cordon paced the noble body-guard of the Pharaoh.

Of one of these Kenkenes asked that a personal attendant of the king be sent to him.

In a little time, some one emerged from the Pharaoh's tent, and came through the guard-line to the messenger. It was Nechutes.

The cup-bearer took but a single glance at Kenkenes and started back.

"Thou!" he exclaimed in a hoarse whisper. "Out of Amenti!"

"And nigh returning into it again," was the tired reply.

In a daze, Nechutes took the offered hands and stared at Kenkenes through the dark.

"Where hast thou been?" he finally asked.

"In the profoundest depths of trouble, Nechutes, nor have I come out therefrom."

The cup-bearer's face showed compassion even in the dusk.

"Nay, now; thine was but the fortune a multitude of lovers have suffered before thee," he said, with a contrite note in his deep voice. "It was even odds between us and I won. Hold it not against me, Kenkenes."

It was the sculptor's turn to be amazed. But with one of the instant realizations that acute memory effects, he recalled that he had disappeared immediately after Nechutes had been accepted by the Lady Tameri. And now, by the word of the apologetic cup-bearer, was it made apparent to Kenkenes that a tragic fancy concerning the cause of his disappearance had taken root in the cup-bearer's mind. With a desperate effort, Kenkenes choked the first desire to laugh that had seized him in months.

"Nay, let it pass, Nechutes," he said in a strained voice. "Thou and I are friends. But lead me to the king, I pray thee."

"To the king?" the cup-bearer repeated doubtfully. "The king sleeps. Will thine interests go to wreck if thou bidest till dawn?"

"I carry him a message," Kenkenes explained.

"A message!"

"Even so. Hand hither a torch."

A soldier went and returned with a flaming knot of pitch. In the wavering light of the flambeau, Nechutes read the address on the linen scroll.

"The king could not read by the night-lights," he said after a little. "Much weeping is not helpful to

such feeble eyes as his. Wait till dawn. My tent is empty and my bed is soft. Wait till daybreak as my guest."

"Where is Har-hat?"

"In his tent, yonder," pointing to a party-colored pavilion.

"Dost thou keep an unsleeping eye on the Pharaoh?"

"By night, aye."

Kenkenes had a thought to accept the cup-bearer's hospitality. He knew that the expected climax would follow immediately upon the king's perusal of the message, and that the nature of that climax depended upon himself. He needed mental vigor and bodily freshness to make effective the work before him. His cogitations decided him.

"Let the unhappy king sleep, then, Nechutes; far be it from me to bring him back to the memory of his sorrows. Lead me to thy shelter, if thou wilt."

With satisfaction in his manner Nechutes conducted his guest into a comfortably furnished tent, and showed him a mattress overlaid with sheeting of fine linen.

"Shame that thou must defer this soft sleeping till the noisy and glaring hours of the day," Kenkenes observed as he fell on the bed.

"By this time to-morrow night, I may content myself in a bed of sand with a covering of hyena-fending stones," the cup-bearer muttered.

"Comfort thee, Nechutes," the artist said sententiously. "But do thou raise me from this ere daybreak, even if thou must take a persuasive spear to me."

So saying, he fell asleep at once.

After some little employment among his effects, the cup-bearer came to the bedside on his way back to the king's tent, and bent over his guest.

"Holy Isis! but I am glad he died not!" he said to himself. "Aye, and there be many who are as glad as I am. Dear Ta-meri! She will be rejoiced, and Hotep. What a great happiness for the old murket—" he paused and clasped his hands together. "He is Mentu's only son! Now, in the name of the mystery-dealing Hathors, how came it that he died not with the first-born?" After a silence he muttered aloud: "Gods! the army would barter its mummy to have the secret of his safety, this day!"

At the first glimmerings of the dawn, the melody of many winded trumpets arose over the encampment of the Egyptians. Now the notes were near and clear, now afar and tremulous; again, deep and sonorous; now, full and rich, and yet again, fine and sweet. There is a pathos in the call of a war-trumpet that no frivolous rendering can subdue—it has sung so long at the death of men and nations.

Outlined in black silhouette against the whitening horizons, the sentries, tiny and slow-moving in the distance, tramped from post to post in a forward-leaning line. Soldiers began to shout to each other. The clanking of many arms made another and a harsher music. The tumult of thousands of voices burdened the wind and above this presently arose the eager and expectant whinnyings of a multitude of war-horses.

While the army broke its fast and prepared to move the king stood in the open space before his tent, with

his eyes on the east. The Red Sea lay there beyond the uplifted line of desert sand, and it was the birthplace of many mists and unpropitious signs.

Would the sun look upon the king through a veil, or openly? Would he smile upon the purposes of the Pharaoh?

There were striations, watery and colorless, in the lower slopes of the morning sky, and these were taking on the light of dawn without its hues. Long wind-blown streaks crossed the zenith from east to west and the setting stars were blurred. The moon had worn a narrowing circlet in the night. Meneptah shook his head.

Suddenly some one in the ranks of the royal guard exclaimed to a mate:

"Look! Look to the southeast!"

Meneptah turned his eyes in that direction, as though he had been commanded. There, above the spot where he had guessed the Israelites to be, a straight and mighty column of vapor extended up, up into the smoky blue of the sky. The tortuous shapes of the striations across the zenith indicated that there was great wind at that height, but the column did not move or change its form. It was further distinguished from the clouds over the dawn, by a fine amber light upon it, deepening to gold in its shadows. So vivid the tint, that steady contemplation was necessary to assure the beholders that it was not fire, climbing in and out of the pillar's heart. Egypt's skies were rarely clouded and never by such a formation as this.

Meneptah turned his troubled eyes hurriedly toward the east. He must not miss the sunrise. At that mo-

ment, unheralded, the disk of the sun shot above the horizon as if blown from a crater of the under-world—blurred, milky-white, without warmth.

He turned away and faced Nechutes, bending before him; behind the cup-bearer, a stately stranger—Kenkenes.

"A message for thee, O Son of Ptah," Nechutes said.

At a sign from the king, the messenger came forward, knelt and delivered the scroll. The king looked at the writing on the wrapping.

"From whom dost thou bring this?" he asked.

"From Jambres, the mystic, O Son of Ptah."

"Ah!" It was the tone of one who has his surmises proved. "Now, what is contained herein?"

Kenkenes took it that the inquiry called for an answer.

"A warning, O King."

"How dost thou know?"

"The purport of the message was told me ere I departed."

"Wherefore? It is not common to lead the messenger into the secret he bears."

"I know, O Son of Ptah," Kenkenes replied quietly; "but the messenger who knew its contents would suffer not disaster or death to stay him in carrying it to thee."

As if to delay the reading of it, the king dismissed Nechutes and signed Kenkenes to arise. Then he turned the scroll over and over in his hands, inspecting it.

"Age does not cool the fever of retaliation," he said

thoughtfully, "and this ancient Jambres hath a grudge against me. Come," he exclaimed as if an idea had struck him, "do thou open it."

Kenkenes took the scroll thrust toward him, and ripped off the linen wrapping. Unrolling the writing he extended it to the king.

"And there is naught in it of evil intent?" Meneptah asked, putting his hands behind him.

"Nay, my King; naught but great love and concern for thee."

"Read it," was the next command. "Mine eyes are dim of late," he added apologetically, for, through the young man's reassuring tones, a faint realization of the trepidation he had exhibited began to dawn on Meneptah.

Kenkenes obeyed, reading without emphasis or inflection, for he knew no expression was needed to convey the force of the message to the already intimidated king.

When Kenkenes had finished, Meneptah was standing very close to him, as if assured of shelter in the heroic shadow of the tall young messenger. The color had receded from the monarch's face, and his eyes had widened till the white was visible all around the iris.

"Call me the guard," he said hoarsely; but when Kenkenes made as if to obey, the king stayed him in a panic.

"Nay, heed me not. Mine assassin may be among them." The sound of his own voice frightened him. "Soft," he whispered, "I may be heard."

Kenkenes maintained silence, for he was not yet ready.

Meanwhile, the king turned hither and thither, es-

sayed to speak and cautiously refrained, grew paler of face and wider of eye, panted, trembled and broke out recklessly at last.

"Gods! Trapped! Hemmed like a wild beast in a circle of spears! Nay, not so honestly beset. Ringed about by vipers ready to strike at every step! And this from mine own people, whom I have cherished and hovered over as they were my children—" His voice broke, but he continued his lament, growing unintelligible as he talked:

"Not enough that mine enemies menace me, but mine own must stab me in my straits! Not even is the identity of mine assassin revealed, and there is none on whom I may call with safety and ask protection—"

"Nay, nay, Beloved of Ptah," Kenkenes interrupted. "There be true men among thy courtiers."

"Not one—not one whom I may trust," Meneptah declared hysterically.

"Here am I, then."

Meneptah, with the inordinate suspicion of the hard-pressed, backed hurriedly away from Kenkenes.

"Who art thou?" he demanded. "How may I know thou art not mine enemy?"

"Not so," Kenkenes protested. "Give me ear, I pray thee. Would I have brought thee thy warning, knowing it such, were I thine enemy? And further, did not Jambres, the mystic, who readeth men's souls, trust me?"

"Aye, so it seems," the king admitted, glad to be won by such physical magnificence. "But who art thou?"

"Kenkenes, the son of Mentu, thy murket."

"It can not be," the king declared with suspicion in his eye. "The murket had but one son and he must be dead with the first-born."

"Nay; I was in the land of Goshen, the night of death, and the God of Israel spared me."

Meneptah continued to gaze at him stubbornly. Then a conclusive proof suggested itself to Kenkenes, which, under the stress of an austere purpose and a soul-trying suspense, he had no heart to use. But the need pressed him; he choked back his unwillingness, and submitted. Coming very close to Meneptah, he began to sing, with infinite softness, the song that the Pharaoh had heard at the Nile-side that sunrise, now as far away as his childhood seemed. How strange his own voice sounded to him—how out of place!

At first, the expression of surprise in the king's face was mingled with perplexity. But the dim records of memory spoke at the urging of association. After a few bars, the Pharaoh's countenance had become reassured. Kenkenes ceased at once.

"Enough!" Meneptah declared. "The gods have most melodiously distinguished thee from all others. Thou art he whom I heard one dawn, and mine heir in Osiris, my Rameses, told me it was the son of Mentu."

"Then, being of the house of Mentu, thou hast no fear of my steadfastness, O my Sovereign?"

"Nay; would that I might be as trustful of all my ministers. Alas, that a single traitor should lay the stain of unfaith upon all the court! Ah, who is mine enemy?"

The sentence, more exclamatory than questioning, seemed to the young man like a call upon him to voice

his impeachments. His inclination pressed hard upon him and the tokens of his knowledge wrote themselves upon his open face. When a man is dodging death and expecting treachery, his perceptions become acute. The king, with his eyes upon the young man's countenance, caught the change of expression.

He sprang at Kenkenes and seized his arms.

"Speak!" he cried violently. "Thou knowest; thou knowest!"

A sudden ebullition of rage and vengeance sent a tingling current through the young man's veins. The moment had come. In the eye of a cautious man, he had been called upon for a dangerous declaration. He had a mighty man to accuse, no proof and little evidence at his command, and a weakling was to decide between them. But his cause equipped him with strength and a reckless courage. He faced the king fairly and made no search after ceremonious words. He spoke as he felt—intensely.

"Nay; it is thou who shalt tell me, O my King. I know thee, even as all Egypt knows thee. There is no power in thee for great evil, but behold to what depths of misery is Egypt sunk! Through thee? Aye, if we charge the mouth for the word the mind willed it to say. Have the gods afflicted thee with madness, or have they given thee into the compelling hands of a knave? Say, who is it, thou or another, who playeth a perilous game with Israel, this day, when its God hath already rent Egypt and consumed her in wrath? Like a wise man thou admittest thine error and biddest thy scourge depart, and lo! ere thy words are cold thou dost arise and recall them and invite the descent of new and hideous affliction upon thine em-

pire! Behold the winnings of thy play, thus far! From Pelusium to Syene, a waste, full of famine, mourners and dead men, and among these last—thy Rameses!—"

Meneptah did not permit him to finish. Purple with an engorgement of grief and fury, the monarch broke in, flailing the air with his arms.

"Har-hat!" he cried. "Not I! Har-hat, who cozened me!"

The voice rang through the royal inclosure, and the ministers came running.

Foremost was Har-hat.

At sight of his enemy, the king put Kenkenes between him and the fan-bearer. At sight of Kenkenes, Har-hat stopped in his tracks.

Behind followed Kephren and Seneferu, the two generals, who, with the exception of Har-hat, the commander-in-chief, were the only arms-bearing men away from their places among the soldiers; after these, Hotep and Nechutes, Menes of the royal body-guard, the lesser fan-bearers, the many minor attachés to the king's person—in all a score of nobles.

They came upon a portentous scene.

The tumult of preparation had subsided and the hush of readiness lay over the desert. The orders were to move the army at sunrise, and that time was past. The pioneers, or path-makers for the army, were already far in advance. Horses had been bridled and each soldier stood by his mount. Captains with their eyes toward the royal pavilion moved about restlessly and wondered. The high commanding officers absent, the next in rank began to weigh their chances to assume command. Soldiers began to surmise to

one another the cause of the delay, which manifestly found its origin in the quarters of the king.

All this was the environment of a hollow square formed by the royal guard. Within was the Pharaoh, shrinking by the side of his messenger. The messenger, taller, more powerful, it seemed, by the heightening and strengthening force of righteous wrath, faced the mightiest man in the kingdom. Har-hat, though a little surprised and puzzled, was none the less complacent, confident, nonchalant. Near the fan-bearer, but behind him, were the ministers, astonished and puzzled. But since the past days had been so filled with momentous events, they were ready to expect a crisis at the slightest incident.

The fan-bearer did not look at the king. It was Kenkenes who interested him.

The young man's frame did not show a tremor, nor his face any excitement. There was an intense quiescence in his whole presence. Hotep, who knew the provocation of his friend and interpreted the menace in his manner, walked swiftly over to Kenkenes, as if to caution or prevent. But the young sculptor undid the small hands of the king, clinging to his arm, and gave them to Hotep, halting, by that act, all interference from the scribe. Then he crossed the little space between him and the fan-bearer.

"What hast thou done with the Israelite?" he asked in a tone so low that none but Har-hat heard him. But the fan-bearer did not doubt the earnestness in the quiet demand.

"Hast thou come to trouble the king with thy petty loves, during this, the hour of war?"

"Answer!"

"She escaped me," the fan-bearer answered.

"A lie will not save thee; the truth may plead for thee before Osiris. Hast thou spoken truly?"

"I have said, as Osiris hears me. Have done; I have no more time for thee!"

"Stand thou there! I have not done with thee."

The thin nostril of the fan-bearer expanded and quivered wrathfully.

"Have a care, thou insolent!" he exclaimed.

Kenkenes did not seem to hear him. He had turned toward Meneptah.

"I have dared over-far, my King," he said, "because of my love for Egypt and my concern for thee. Bear with me further, I pray thee."

Meneptah bent his head in assent.

"Suffer mine inquiry, O Son of Ptah. Wilt thou tell me upon whose persuasion thou hast gathered thine army and set forth to pursue Israel?"

"Upon the persuasion of Har-hat, my minister."

"Yet this question further, my King. Wherefore would he have thee overtake these people?"

"Since it was foolish to let them go, being my slaves, my builders and very needful to Egypt. But most particularly to execute vengeance upon them for the death of my Rameses, and for the first-born of Egypt."

"Ye hear," Kenkenes said to the nobles. Then he faced Har-hat. The fan-bearer's countenance showed a remarkable increase of temper, but there was no sign of apprehension or discomfiture upon it.

"Thou hast beheld the grace of thy king under question," Kenkenes said calmly. "Therefore thou art denied the plea that submission to the same thing will be-

little thee. Thy best defense is patience and prompt answer."

"Perchance the king will recall his graceful testimony," Har-hat replied with heat, "when he learns he hath been entangled in the guilty pursuit of a miscreant after—"

Kenkenes stopped him with a menacing gesture.

"Say it not; nor tempt me further! Thou speakest of a quarrel between thee and me, and of that there may be more hereafter. Now, thou art to answer to mine impeachment of thee as an offender against the Pharaoh."

Har-hat received the declaration with a wrathful exclamation.

"Thou! Thou to accuse me! I to plead before thee! By the gods, the limit is reached. The ranks of Egypt have been juggled, the law of deference reversed! A noble to bow to an artisan! Age to give account of itself to green youth!"

"And thou pratest of law! The benefits of law are for him who obeys it; the reverence of youth is for the honorable old. But thou wastest mine opportunity. Thou shalt silence me no longer.

"Thy dearest enemy, O Har-hat," Kenkenes continued, "would not impugn thy wits. He deserves the epithet himself who calls thee fool. But be not puffed up for this thing I have said. Thou hast made a weapon of thy wits and it shall recoil upon thee. Thou seest Egypt; not in all the world is there another empire so piteously humbled. Her fields are white with bones instead of harvests; her cities are loud with mourning instead of commerce; the desert hath over-

run the valley. And this from the hands of the Hebrews' God! Who doubts it? Hath Egypt won any honor in this quarrel with Israel? Look upon Egypt and learn. Hath the army of the Pharaoh availed him aught against these afflictions? Remember the polluted waters, the pests, the thunders, the darkness, the angel of death and tell me. 'Vengeance?' Vengeance upon a God who hath blasted a nation with His breath? Chastisement of a people whose murmurs brought down consuming fire upon the land? And yet, for vengeance and chastisement hast thou urged the king to follow after Israel. I know thee better, Har-hat! That serviceable wit of thine hath not failed thee in an hour. Thou hast not wearied of life that thou courtest destruction by the Hebrews' God. Never hast thou meant to overtake Israel! Never hast thou thought further to provoke their God! Rather was it thine intent here, somewhere in the desert, thyself to be a plague upon Meneptah and wear his crown after him!"

Confident were the words, portentous the manner as though proof were behind, astounding the accusation. One by one the ministers had fallen away from Har-hat and placed themselves by the king. After a long time of humiliation for them, the supplanter, the insulter, was overtaken, his villainy uncovered to the eyes of the king. Kenkenes had justified them, and their triumph had come with a gust of wrath that added further to their relief.

Hotep gazed fixedly at Kenkenes. Where had this young visionary, new-released from prison, found evidence to impeach this powerful favorite? How was he fortified? What would be his next play? How much more did he know? And while Hotep asked himself

these things, trembling for Kenkenes, Har-hat put the same questions to himself. The roll of papyrus, with its seals, still in the young man's hands, was significant. He folded his arms and forced the issue.

"Your proof," he demanded.

"Both the hour and need of my proof are past. Already art thou convicted." Kenkenes indicated the king and the ministers behind him. The fan-bearer followed the motion of the arm and for the first time met the gaze of the angry group.

Kenkenes had not ventured blindly, nor dared without deep and shrewd thought. When the artist-soul can feel the fiercer passions it has the capacity to work them out in action. Kenkenes, having been wronged, grew vengeful, and therefore had it within him to aspire to vengeance. He knew his handicap, but had estimated well his strength. With calmness and deliberation he had studied conditions, assembled all contingencies and fortified himself against them, gathered hypotheses, summarized his evidence and brought about that which he had planned to accomplish—the destruction of Har-hat's rule over Meneptah.

Har-hat was alone. Before him were all the powers of the land arrayed against him. Behind him in Tanis was Seti, the heir, who hated him, and the queen who had turned her back upon him. He had not seen the need of friends during the days of his supremacy over Meneptah. Now, not all his denials, eloquence, subtleties could establish him again in the faith of the frightened king. His ministership had crumbled beyond reconstruction. What would avail him, then, to defend himself? What proof had he to offer against this impeachment? The young man's argument met him at

every avenue toward which he might turn for escape. At best his future in Egypt would be mere toleration; the worst, condign punishment.

A flame of feeling surged into his face. With a wide sweep of his arm, as though to thrust away pretense, he faced the ministers, all the defiance and audacity of his nature faithfully manifested in his manner.

"Why wait ye? Would ye see me cringe? Would ye hear me deny, protest, deprecate? Go to! ye glowering churls, I disappoint you! Flock to the king; dandle the royal babe a while! Endure the stress a little, for ye will not serve him long. And thou," whirling upon Kenkenes, "dreamest thou I fear this bloody God of Israel, or all the gibbering, incense-sniffing, pedestal-cumbering gods of earth? I will show thee, thou ranting rabble spawn! See which of us hath the yellow-haired wanton when I return. For I go to wrest spoil and fighting men from Israel. Then, by all the demons of Amenti! then, I say! look to thy crown, thou puny, puling King!"

With a bound he broke through the cordon of royal guards, leaped into his chariot, and putting his horses to a gallop, drove at full speed to his place at the head of the army. There, in an instant, clear and long-drawn, his command to mount rang over the desert. Front and rear, wing and wing, the trumpets took up the call, "To horse!" A second command in the strong voice, a second winding of the many trumpets, and with a rush of air and jar of earth the great army of the Pharaoh swept like the wind toward the sea.

Kenkenes, Menes, Nechutes and those of the royal guard that had started in pursuit of the traitor, did well to save themselves from annihilation under the

hoofs of twenty thousand horse. Bewildered and amazed, they were an instant realizing what was taking place.

"He is running away with the army!" they said to themselves in a daze. "He is running away with the army!" And they knew that not all the efforts of the guards and the ministers and the Pharaoh himself would avail, for the army had received its orders from its great commander and no man but he might turn it back.

So the short-poled chariots, multi-tinted and gorgeous, wheel to wheel, axle-deep in a cloud of dust, glittered out across the desert—sixty ranks, ten abreast. Far to the left moved the horsemen, the dust of their rapid passage hiding their galloping mounts up to the stirrup. To the watchers by the king they seemed like an undulant sea of quilted helmets and flying tassels, while the sunlight smote through a level and straight-set forest of spears. They were seasoned veterans, many of them heroes of a quarter-century of wars. They had followed Rameses the Great into Asia and had extended the empire and the prowess of arms to the farthest corners of the known world. They had drunk the sweets of unalloyed victory from the blue Nile to the Euphrates and had filled Egypt with booty, scented with the airs of Arabia, gorgeous from the looms of India, and heavy with the ivory and gold of Ethiopia.

Now they went in formidable array in pursuit of two millions of slaves to dye their axes in unresisting blood, to return, not as victors over a heroic foe, but as drivers of men, herders of sheep and cattle, and laden with inglorious spoil.

Behind them, in regular ranks, beaten by their drivers into an awkward run, came the sumpter-mules, and after them the rumbling carts filled with provision.

Meneptah, raging and weeping, saw his army leave him and gallop in an aureole of dust toward the Red Sea.

Thus it was that "the Pharaoh drew nigh," but came no farther after Israel.

CHAPTER XLIV

THE WAY TO THE SEA

Kenkenes did not remain long in the apathy of amazement and helplessness. Consternation possessed him the instant he roused himself sufficiently to realize and speculate. He had saved the king and exposed Har-hat, but the accomplishing of this temporary good had forced the probable commission of a great evil. If death in some form did not overtake the fan-bearer he could enrich and strengthen himself from Israel. Then, even if Meneptah's army did not continue to follow him, he would be enabled to buy mercenaries and return equipped to do battle with Meneptah, even as he had vowed. The flower of the military was with him; the Pharaoh was incapable and Egypt demoralized. The success of the traitor seemed assured. What then of Rachel, of his own father, of the faithful ministers, of all whom Kenkenes had loved or befriended? The thought filled him with resolution and vigor.

"If the Lord God of Israel overtake him not," he said, returning to the king, "then must I! For, in my good intent, it seems that I have undone thee. Hotep," he continued, taking the scribe's hands, "let my father know that I died not with the first-born. Also, thou seest the danger into which the nation hath descended

in this hour. Help thou the king! I return not. Farewell."

He kissed the scribe on the lips, and freeing himself from his clinging hands, ran through the broken line of the royal guards.

The army was already a compact cluster in the center of a rolling cloud of dust to the south.

When Nechutes had aroused him before daybreak, the cup-bearer had brought Hotep with him, and while the messenger broke his fast, he had availed himself of the scribe's presence to learn many things. Not the smallest part of his information was the fact that the Pharaoh's scouts had located Israel encamped on a sedgy plain at the base of a great hill on the northernmost arm of the Red Sea. Meneptah's army had marched twenty-five miles due south of Pithom and pitched its tents for the night. It was twenty-five miles from that point to Baal-Zephon or the hill before which Israel had camped. The fugitives had chosen the smoothest path for travel, keeping along the Bitter Lakes that their cattle might feed. Their track led in a southeasterly direction.

But Har-hat, making off with the army, had struck due south. He had chosen this line for more than one advantage it offered. The Arabian desert approached the sea in a series of plateaux or steps. The most westerly was surmounted by a ridge of high hills, higher probably than any other chain within the boundaries of Egypt. The most easterly overlooked the seabeach and was originally, it may be, the old sea margin. At points the table-land advanced within sight of the water; at other localities an intervening space of several

miles lay between it and the sea. The summit was flat, at least smooth enough for the passage of horsemen, and at all times it was a good field for strategic manœuverings by an army arrayed against anything which might be on the beach below.

If Meneptah's scouts had reported truly, Israel had behind it a hill, east of it the sea. West of it the army would approach. South only could it flee, into a torrid, arid, uninhabited desert.

The slaves were entrapped. The pursuer had but to follow the pursued in the only open direction, and overtake the starving, thirsting multitude at last. But from Har-hat's movement he had meant to continue along this plateau, out of sight of Israel, until he had posted part of his army in the way of escape to the south. Kenkenes reached this conclusion without much pondering. He had his own manœuverings in mind. Of the captain of Israel, Prince Mesu, he would discover, first, if the Lord God had prepared him against Har-hat. This grave question answered to the repose of his mind concerning the welfare of Israel, the path of his next duty would be clearly laid for him. He would join the army and take the life of the fan-bearer, for the sake of all he loved, and Egypt. In the course of the day's events his motive had been exalted from the personal desire for revenge to the high intent of a patriot. He felt most confident that he would forfeit his own life in the act.

Not an instant did he hesitate.

Ahead of him was the narrow bed of a miniature torrent which rolled out of the desert during the infrequent rains. Now it was dry, packed hard, free of all

obstructions except the great boulders, and led in a comparatively straight line toward the sea. It was an ideal stretch for running.

He summoned all his forces, gathering, in a mighty mental effort, all that depended on his speed, and took the path with a leap. The dazed king and his ministers saw him with whom they had that moment talked stretch a vast and ever-widening breach between them with a bat-like swoop, and while they watched he was swallowed up in distance.

The bed of the torrent served him for the first few miles. Then it turned abruptly toward the Bitter Lakes. He left it and entered the rougher country. Thereafter no great bursts of speed were possible, because the runner had to pick his way. He ran, not with a steady pace, each stride equal to the preceding, but with bounds, aside and forward, dimly calculating the safety of the footfall.

Suddenly a column of sand rose under his feet, and he dashed through it. Blinded and choking, he cleared his eyes, caught his breath and ran on. A gust of wind, like a breath of flame, met him from the east and passed. Then he realized that the atmosphere had thickened, as if an opaque cloud of heat had enveloped the earth. He glanced at the sky and saw that it was strewn with fragmentary clouds, but a little south and east of him was the pillar, unmoving and gilded royally.

There was storm in the air.

Finally the region began to grow level, proving the proximity to the sea. In another moment he came upon the old sea bed. It was sandy, sedge-grown, with here and there a palm, and tremendously trampled.

Israel had passed this way.

The clash and ring of meeting metal fell on his ear. He looked and saw ahead of him two men fighting with a third. Three horses with empty saddles nervously watched the fray.

The single combatant was a soldier in the uniform of a common fighting man. One of the pair was a tall Nubian in a striped tunic; the other was an Egyptian, short, fat, purple of countenance—Unas!

With a furious exclamation, Kenkenes slackened his pace only long enough to undo the falchion at his side and rushed to the fight. It did not matter to him who the soldier was or what his cause. The fact that he was fighting the emissaries of Har-hat was sufficient indorsement of the lone soldier. But even as he sprang forward, Unas sank on the sand, moved convulsively once or twice and lay still.

The soldier staggered back from the second servitor and fell. The Nubian, standing over him, swung his heavy weapon aloft, but Kenkenes thrust his falchion over the fallen man and caught the blow, as it descended, upon the broad back of the blade.

"Set receive your cursed soul," the Nubian snarled. Kenkenes leaped across the prostrate soldier, and simultaneously the weapons went up, descended and clashed. Then followed a wild and fearful battle.

The Egyptian falchion was nothing more than a sword-shaped ax. Therefore, these were not tongues of steel which would whip their supple length one across the other and fill the air with the lightning of their play and the devilish beauty of their music. The vanquished would not taste the nice death of a spitted heart. There was yet the method of the stone-ax war-

riors in this battle, and he who fell would be a fearful thing to see.

Perhaps it was because Kenkenes was stronger and more agile; perhaps he remembered Deborah at that moment, or perhaps he was simply a better fighter. Whatever the cause his blade went up and descended at last, before the Nubian could parry, and the second servitor of Har-hat fell on his face and died.

Chilled by the instant sobering, which follows the taking of life, the young man sickened and whirled away from the quivering flesh. Plunging his falchion in the sand to hide its stain, he went back to the fallen soldier.

He knew by the look on the gray face, by the dark pool that had grown beside him, that the warrior had fought his last fight. Kenkenes raised the man's head, and heard these words, faintly spoken:

"He sent them in pursuit. I knew he meant to do it, but I could not get near to kill him. So I followed them. But thou art her lover; do thou protect her now."

"Her! Rachel?" Kenkenes cried. "Who art thou?"

"Atsu, once her taskmaster, always her—" the voice died away.

"Where is she?" Kenkenes implored. "In the name of thy gods, go not yet! Where is she?"

The lips parted in answer, but no sound came. The arm went up as if to point, but it fell limp without indicating direction, and with a sigh the soldier turned his face away.

Sobbing, wild with anxiety and grief, Kenkenes shook the inert body, pleading frantically for some sign

to guide him to Rachel. But there was no response, for the dead speak not out of Amenti.

At last Kenkenes laid the body down and stood up. It had come to him very plainly that, but for Atsu, already these dead servitors would have been beyond overtaking in pursuit of his love. Though a worshiper of Israel's God, Kenkenes was still Egyptian in his instincts. The man who had died to save Rachel he could not bury uncoffined in a grave of sand, where the natural processes of dissolution would destroy him utterly. His and Rachel's debts to Atsu were great, and the demand was made upon him now to discharge all that was possible in the one act of caring for the dead soldier's remains. Kenkenes could not bear the body back to the group he had left about the king, for he had a mission which concerned all the living who were dear to him. Furthermore the sky was threatening, the desert was a terrible place during high winds, and he dared not delay.

Suddenly a thought struck him. Travelers and seafaring men had told him that there were settlements along the Red Sea. Might he not go forward, on his way after Israel, till he found one of these?

He led the largest horse past the dead servitors, and persuading it to stand, lifted the body of Atsu upon its back. With difficulty he mounted, and supporting the limp burden with one arm, turned again toward the southeast.

As he went forward, Kenkenes meditated on the signs of this recent and tragic event. He had searched throughout the length and breadth of Goshen for Rachel and none had seen her or heard of her

since she had fled from Har-hat into the desert, eight months before he had seen her last. Israel was more ignorant of the whereabouts of Rachel than he. He could not tell whether Har-hat knew where she was, nor could he guess from the position of the fighters in which direction the servants had meant to ride. The tracks of their horses were not to be discovered in the great trampled roadway Israel had made.

Of this thing Kenkenes was sure. If Rachel were with Israel she had joined it after he had left Goshen. In that case he was going to her, to ask after her safety, when he inquired after all Israel. If she were still in Egypt he would stop Har-hat's search for ever. This recollection added to his determination and intensified his zeal.

At the beginning of the great fields of sea-grass he came upon a little hamlet. It was a considerable distance inland, and the chief industry of the people could have been only the gathering of sedge for hay, or the curing of herb and root for medicines. Some of the villagers were in sight but the most of them were out in the direction of the lakes, laboring in the marsh grass.

In the course of the past year's events Kenkenes had learned to be a cautious and skilful fugitive. He did not care to be caught and taxed with the death of the man whose body he bore. The village shrine was the structure nearest to him. It was built of sun-dried brick, with three walls, the fourth side open to the sunrise. Kenkenes dismounted and reconnoitered. The shrine was empty, and none of the villagers was near.

He lifted the dead man from the horse and bore the body into the sanctuary. Before the image of Athor

was a long table overlaid with a slab of red sandstone. Here the offerings were left and here Kenkenes laid Atsu, a true sacrifice to the love deity. Reverently the young man closed the eyes and straightened the chilling limbs. Going into his patrimony of jewels sewn in his belt, he took an emerald, and putting it in the hands, crossed them above the breast. Then he laid his mantle over the bier.

At the threshold he found a soft stone and with that he wrote upon the head of the long table the name of the dead man, and Mendes, his native city. Under this he wrote further to the villagers, charging them, in the name of the goddess, to care for the body reverently and return it to the tomb of Atsu's fathers. Having made note of the emerald as remuneration for their labors, he completed the inscription without signature.

Thus he insured the safety and preservation of the bones of Atsu, and in the eye of the average Egyptian he had served the soldier well. But Kenkenes was not satisfied.

As he left the shrine he muttered with trembling lips:

"Bless him! The fate is not kind which yields to such goodness no reward save gratitude. There must be, because of the great God's justness, some especial blessing laid up for Atsu."

In the time he had spent in the sanctuary the atmosphere had grown hazy and the sun shone obscurely. To the east were tumbled and darkening masses, which gathered even as he looked and joined till they stretched in a vast and unillumined sweep about the horizon. The wind had died and the heat bathed him in perspiration.

Once again his eyes sought the pillar and found it above him, still somewhat to the east, yet in form unchanged, in hue undimmed. Something within him associated the column of cloud with Israel and Israel's God.

He went to his horse and found him terrified and unmanageable. After vain efforts to soothe the creature, he walked away a little space, clasping his hands.

"O Thou mysterious God! By these tokens Thy hand is upon the earth and upon the heavens. Even as Thou hast shielded me thus far, withdraw not Thy sheltering hand from about me, Thy worshiper, in this, Thy latest hour of mystery."

He skirted the village, now filling with frightened peasants, and took the path of Israel.

It led in a southeasterly direction toward a far-off hill, barely outlined through the haze of the distance. Meanwhile the darkness settled and over the sea the somber bastion of cloud heaved its sooty bulk up the sky. The air stagnated and the whole desert was soundless.

A round and tumbled mass, blue-black but attended by a copper-colored rack, detached itself from a shelf-like stratum of cloud, and elongating, seemed to descend to the surface of the sea. Daylight went out instantly and a prolonged moan came from the distant east. Blinding flashes of lightning illuminated the whirling mass and almost absolute darkness fell after each bolt. Out of the inky midnight toward the east came an ever-increasing sound of a maddened sea, gathering in volume and fury and menace. Kenkenes flung himself on his face and waited.

He did not have long to wait.

With a noise of mighty rending, reinforced by a continuous roll of savage thunder, the storm struck. A spinning cone of wind caught a great expanse of sand, and lifting the loose covering, carried a huge twisting column inland—death and entombment for any living thing it met. With it went a great blast of spray, stones, sea-weed, masses of sedge uprooted bodily, much wreckage, palm trees, small huts which went to pieces as they were carried along, wild and domestic animals, anything and everything that lay in the path of the storm.

The rotatory movement passed with the first whirl, but a hurricane, blowing with overcoming velocity, pressed like a wall against anything that strove to face it. Its hoarse raving filled Kenkenes' ears with titanic sound. The breath was snatched from his nostrils; his eyelids, tightly closed, were stung with sharply driven sand. Though he struggled to his feet and attempted to proceed, he staggered and wandered and was prone to turn away from the solid breast of the mighty blast. He could not hope to make headway blinded, yet he dared not lift his face to the sand. He could make a shelter over his eyes that he might watch his feet, but he could not discover path and direction in this manner.

The day was far advanced, and already the army had outstripped him. Might not Har-hat at this hour be descending with his veterans, seasoned against the simoons of Arabia, upon Israel, demoralized in the storm?

Desperate, the young man dropped his hands and flung up his head.

He was standing in a soft light, very faintly diffused

about him but narrowing ahead of him, brightening, as it contracted, into almost daytime brilliance to the south. The illuminated strip was not wide; the plateau to the west was dark; the farther east likewise storm-obscured. Taking courage, he raised his eyes for an instant. The drifting sand would not permit a longer contemplation, but in that fleeting glimpse he discovered the source of the supernatural radiance. The pillar was tinged like a cloud in the sunset, with a mellow and benign fire.

Kenkenes did not marvel and was not perplexed. The miracles no longer amazed him, but he had not become indifferent or unthankful. Each forward step he took was a declaration of faith; the thrill of relief in his veins, a psalm of thanksgiving. The stones were as many and as sharp, the way as untender, and the mighty tempest strove against him as powerfully, but he followed the ray, trusting it implicitly.

Night fell unnoticed for it merged with the supernatural darkness of the day.

At the summit of the slope which led down to the water's edge, he paused. Below him was a gentle declivity ending to the south in darkness. There was not a glimmer of radiance on the sea. Far to the east could be heard the sound of infuriated surges, storming the rocks, but dense darkness shrouded all the distance. Only the beach directly under him was alight. The shadows cast were blacker than daylight shadows, and the radiance had a touch of gold, which gilded everything beneath it. The poorest object was enriched, the gaudiest subdued.

Had the number of Israel been ten thousand or even

a hundred thousand, Kenkenes might have had some conception of the multitude. The millions massed below him on the sand were not to be looked on except as a vast unit.

The tribes were divided, the herds were collected at the rear or inland side, and the lepers were isolated, but no order in detail was possible. Tents were down, goods were being gathered, and much commotion was apparent. Even at a distance Kenkenes could see that consternation and dismay were rife among Israel. The whole valley was murmurous with subdued outcry, and a multitudinous lowing and bleating of the herds swept up, blown wildly by the hurricane.

The senses, too, are limited in their grasp, even as the brain has bounds upon its conception. The dimensions, movement and sound of the multitude overtaxed the eye and ear.

Was it the storm or the army that had frightened them?

Slipping and sliding in his haste, he descended the slope without care for the sound he made. The hillocks and hollows that interposed irritated him. His impatience made him forget his great weariness. Israel's helpless ones to the sword, Israel's treasure open to the enrichment of a traitor, Israel's fighting-men driven to rally to his standard—Rachel's people, to be mastered by Har-hat!

Great was his intent and its scope, and how cheaply attained if it cost but two lives—his enemy's and his own! How much depended upon him! His enthusiasm and zeal put out of his sight all his young reluctance to surrender life and the world. He could have explained, truthfully, from his own feelings,

what it is that enables men to suffer an eager martyrdom.

Two Hebrews outside the limits of the camp halted him.

"I bring tidings to your captain," he explained. The answer was swept from the speaker's lips and carried astray by the wind, but he caught these words.

"Thou art an Egyptian. Thy kind hath no friendship for Israel."

"I am of Egypt, but I am one with you in faith. Conduct me to the prince, I pray you."

"Take him," said one to the other. "He is but one."

The Hebrew, thus addressed, motioned Kenkenes to follow him, and turned toward the encampment.

They passed through a lane between two tribes. Kenkenes guessed, looking first upon one and then the other, that there were one hundred thousand in the two. Strip a city of her plan and shape, her houses, her pleasures and commerce; leave only her people, their smallest possessions, and all their fears; beset such a city with an army on three sides, the sea on the fourth and a furious hurricane over all—and in such state and of such appearance were these two tribes.

Kenkenes fortified himself and resisted with all his might the contagious panic that seemed about to attack him. As well as he might, he concentrated his mind upon other things. He noted that the shadows were long like those of afternoon. Turning his head, he saw that the pillar stood behind the encampment and that its light was thrown forward and downward, not backward and outward. Very manifestly, the benefits

of the miracle were only for the believers in Jehovah. The marvel brought into the young man's mind some natural speculation concerning the great miracle-worker to whom his guide was leading him. What manner of man was he about to look upon,—a sorcerer, a trafficker in horrors, a confounder of men?

Ahead, particularly illumined by the celestial light, was a group of elders—great, grave men, misted in the flying fleeces of their own beards. They bent firmly against the blast and the broad streaming of their ample drapings added much to the idea of supernatural power and resistance they inspired.

The Hebrew leading Kenkenes slackened his step as if hesitating to approach so venerable a council, when suddenly the group separated, revealing a majestic man about whom it had been clustered.

After a word in his own tongue, delivered with bent head and deferential attitude, the Hebrew stood aside.

Kenkenes prepared to meet a prince of Egypt, whatever the personality of the Israelite. He dropped on one knee, bent his head and extended his hand with the palm toward Moses. The great man took the fingers and bade the young Egyptian arise. Forty years a courtier, forty years a shepherd, but the graces of the one had not been forgotten in the simplicities of the other. When Kenkenes gained his feet, lo! he faced the wondrous stranger he had seen in the tomb of the Incomparable Pharaoh.

At a sign from Moses Kenkenes came near to him, that the howl of the tempest and the turmoil of Israel might not drown their voices.

"Thou art weary, my son," the Israelite said, glancing at the tired face and dusty raiment. "Hast thou come from afar?"

"From Goshen to Tanis, and hither, O Prince."

"Afoot?"

"Even so."

"Thou hast journeyed farther than Israel, and Israel is most weary. I trust thy journey is done."

And this was the confounder of Egypt, the vicar of God—this kindly noble!

"Not yet, O Prince; but its dearest mission endeth here. I come of the blood of the oppressors, but I am full of pity for thy people's wrongs. Knowest thou that the Egyptians pursue thee? Is thy hand made strong with resource? Hath the Lord God prepared thee against them?"

"From whom art thou sent?" the Israelite asked pointedly.

"I am come of mine own accord."

"Wherefore?"

"Because I am one with Israel in faith."

The great Lawgiver surveyed him in silence for a moment, but the penetrative brilliance in his eyes softened.

"Wast thou taught?" he asked at last.

"In casting away the idols, nay; in finding the true God, I was."

In the pause that followed, Israel lifted up its voice, and to Kenkenes it seemed that the people besought their great captain, urgingly and chidingly. The Lawgiver listened for a little space. His gaze was absent, the lines of his face were sad. Something in his attitude seemed to say, "What profiteth all Thy

care, O Lord? Behold Thy chosen—these men of little faith!"

Then, as if some thought of the young proselyte, the Egyptian, arose in contrast, his eyes came back to Kenkenes again.

"Thou hast filled me with gladness, my son," he said simply.

Kenkenes bowed his head and made no answer. Presently the Israelite spoke to the panic-stricken people nearest to him. In the tone and the words he used there was a world of paternal kindliness—a composite of confidence, reassurance, and implied protection, that should have soothed.

"Fear ye not; stand still and see the salvation of the Lord. For the Egyptians ye have seen this day, ye shall see again no more for ever."

At the words, Kenkenes lifted his head quickly. The Hebrew had answered his question, but how enigmatically! Was Israel to escape, or Har-hat to be destroyed? In either case, the young man wondered concerning himself. Again the eyes of the Lawgiver returned to him, as if the sight of the young Egyptian was grateful to him.

"Abide with us," he said. "Saith not thy faith, 'Fear not; the Lord shall fight for thee?'"

Kenkenes' face wore a startled expression; how had the Israelite divined his purpose? "Saith not thy faith?" Faith? He confessed faith, but faith had not spoken that thing to him. Slowly and little by little it began to manifest itself to him, that he had wavered in his trust; that the purpose of his visit to Israel had questioned the fidelity of his God's care; that so surely had he doubted, he had defied danger and fought with

death to ask after the intent of the Lord; that he had meant to perform the duty which the Lord had left undone. The realization came with a rush of shame. In the asking he had betrayed his wavering, and Moses had tactfully told him of it. A surge of color swept over his face.

"Thou hast recalled my trust to me, my Prince," he said in a lowered tone. "Till now, I knew not that it had failed me. But remember thou, it was my love for Israel—O, and my love for mine own—that made me fear. Forgive me, I pray thee."

The Lawgiver laid his hand on the young man's shoulder but did not answer at once. The growing clamor about them had reached the acme of insistence. The nearest people pressed through the tribal lines and, rushing forward, began to throw themselves on their knees, tumbling in circles about the majestic Hebrew. Others kept their feet, and with arms and clenched hands above their heads, shouted vehemently. Their cries were partly in Egyptian, partly in their own tongue, but the cause of their terror and the burden of their supplications were the same. The Egyptians were upon them! Even the dumb beasts were swept into the panic and the illuminated beach shook with sound.

After a little sad contemplation of the clamoring horde about him, the Lawgiver drew nearer to Kenkenes and said in his ear, because the tumult drowned his voice:

"The Lord will fight for thee; thine enemy can not flee His strong hand. Wait upon Him and behold His triumph."

Kenkenes bowed his head in acquiescence.

CHAPTER XLV

THROUGH THE RED SEA

The voices of the storm found harmonious tones of different pitch and swelled in glorious accord from the faintest breath of melody to an almighty blast that stunned the senses with stupendous harmony. Then the chord seemed to melt and lose itself in the wild dissonances of the hurricane.

The turmoil of Israel began to subside, growing fainter, ceasing among the ranks nearest the sea, failing toward the rear, dying away like a sigh up and down the long encampment. The people that had been on their knees rose slowly. The bleating of the flocks quieted into stillness. Commotion ceased and Israel held its breath.

The Lawgiver had passed from among them, and those that followed him with their eyes saw that he was moving toward the sea, seemingly at the very limit of the outer radiance and still going on. First to one and then to another, it became apparent that the extent of the illuminated beach was widening. Hither and thither over the multitude the intelligence ran, in whispers or by glances. Having showed his neighbor each looked again. Ripple-worn sand, shells, barnacle-covered rocks, slowly came within the pale of the radiance and Moses moved with it. Eight

stalwart Hebrews, bearing a funeral ark, shrouded with a purple pall, fringed with gold, emerged from among the people and, taking a place in front of the Lawgiver, walked confidently down the sand toward the east.

The radiance progressed step by step. Wet rocks entered the glow, lines of sea-weed, immense drifts of debris, the brink of a ledge, the shadow before it, and then a sandy bottom.

A long line of old men, two abreast, the wind making the picture awesome as it tossed their beards and gray robes, followed the Lawgiver. After these several litters, borne by young men, proceeded in imposing order.

Except for the raving of the tempest there was no sound in Israel.

A double file of camels with sumptuous housings moved with dignified and unhasty tread after the litters. By this time, the foremost ranks of the procession were some distance ahead, the limit of radiance just in advance, and lighting with special tenderness the funeral ark. Here were the bones of that noblest son of Jacob. Having brought Israel into Egypt, Joseph was leading it forth again.

Pools, lighted by the ray, glowed like sheets of gold, darkling here and there with shadow; long ledges of rock, bearded with deep-water growth, sparkled rarely in the light; stretches of sodden sand, colored with salts of the waters, and littered with curious fish-life, lay between.

Where was the sea?

After the camels followed a score of mules, little and trim in contrast to the tall shaggy beasts ahead

of them. They were burden-bearing animals, precious among Israel, for they were laden with the records of the tribes, much treasure in jewels and fine stuffs, incense, writing materials, and such things as the people would need, and were not to be had from among them, or like to be found in the places to which they might come. These passed and their drivers with them.

The next moment, Kenkenes was caught in the center of a rushing wave of humanity. He fought off the consternation that threatened to seize him and tried to care for himself, but a reed on the breast of the Nile at flood could not have been more helpless. Behind Israel were the Egyptians, ahead of it miraculous escape; the one impulse of the multitude was flight. That any remembered his mate or his children, his goods, his treasure or his cattle, was a marvel.

The foremost ranks, moving in directly behind the leaders, had adopted their pace. Furthermore, as the advance-guard, they had a greater sense of security, and before them was all the east open for flight. Not so with the hindmost; they were near the dreaded place from which the army would descend; ahead of them was a deliberate host; within them, soul-consuming fear and panic. The rear rushed, the forward ranks walked, and the center caught between was jammed into a compact mass.

Neither halt nor escape was possible. Press as the hindmost might upon those forward, the pace was slackened, instead of quickened. The advance grew slower as it extended back through the ranks, for each succeeding line lost a modicum in the length of the step, till at the rear they were pushing hard and barely

moving. No wonder they sobbed, prayed, panted, surged, swayed and pressed. How they reviled the snail-like leaders, not knowing that the sturdy pace lagged in the body of the multitude. So they hasted and progressed only inch by inch.

After the first moment of battle against the human sea, Kenkenes recognized the futility of resistance and suffered himself to be borne along. There was no turning back now, had he been so disposed. He had left behind him his purposes, unaccomplished.

He had received no explicit promise from Moses, and if he had given ear to the doubts of his own reason, he might have been sorely afraid, much troubled for Egypt and all he loved therein. But he went with the multitude passively, even contentedly; he did not speculate how his God would fight for him; his faith was perfect.

As for his presence with Israel, no one heeded him. Sometimes it came his way to be helpful; an old man lost his feet and becoming panic-stricken was soothed only when the young Egyptian put a strong arm about him and held him till his feet touched earth again. Children became heavy in the arms of parents and the little Hebrews had no fear of the young man who carried them, a while, instead. But no one stopped to take notice that this was an Egyptian, totally unlike those among the "mixed multitude" that had come to join Israel; nor did any wonder what a nobleman of the blood of the oppressors did among the fleeing slaves. Indeed, if the host had any thought beyond the impulse of self-preservation, it was only a dim realization that they were walking over a most rocky,

oozy and untender road and that the smell of the sea was very strong about them.

In the early hours of the morning, having become so accustomed to the roar of the wind and the sound of the moving multitude, Kenkenes ceased to be conscious of it. Other sounds, which hours before would have failed to reach his ears, became distinct. The crying of tired children reached him, and he detected even snatches of talk among the ranks some distance away from him. Thus a clamor of noise, secondary in force, grew about him. Above it all, at last, came a sound that would have made him halt if he could.

He tried to think it one of the many voices of the storm, but the second time he heard it, he knew what it was.

Far to the rear, a trumpet-call, beautiful and spirited, rose upon the air.

The Egyptian army was in pursuit!

Israel heard it, and crying aloud in its terror, swept forward, as if the trumpet-call had commanded it. Kenkenes felt a quickening of pulse, a momentary tremor, but no more.

He became conscious finally of a warmth penetrating his sandals. He knew that he had been struggling up a slope for a long time, and now he realized that he was again on the dry, sun-heated sand of the desert. The multitude ceased to crowd, the pressure about him diminished; the ranks began to widen to his left and right; the leaders halted altogether, and though there was still much movement among the body and rear of the host, people turned to look upon their neighbors.

The overhanging cloud parted from the eastern horizon, leaving a strip of sky softly lighted by the

coming morn. Without any preliminary diminution of its force, the wind failed entirely.

Kenkenes, with many others, looked back and saw that the pillar, illuminated, but no longer illuminating, had halted above a solitary figure of seemingly superhuman stature in the morning gray, standing on an eminence, overlooking the sea.

The arm was uplifted and outstretched, tense and motionless.

From his superior height, Kenkenes saw, over the heads of the immense concourse, two lines of foam riding like the wind across the sea-bed toward each other. Between them was a great body of plunging horses; overhead a forest of fluttering banners; and faint from the commotion came shouts and wild notes of trumpets. Then the two lines of foam smote against each other with a fearful rush and a muffled report like the cannonading of surf. A mountain of water pitched high into the air and collapsed in a vast froth, which spread abroad over the churning, wallowing sea. The falling wind dashed a sheet of spray over the silent host on the eastern shore. Sharp against the white foam, dark objects and masses sank, arose, and sank again.

At that moment the sun thrust a broad shaft of light between the horizon and the lifted cloud.

It discovered only the sea, raving and stormy, and afar to the west a misty, vacant, lifeless line of shore.

"And the waters returned and covered the chariots and the horsemen, and all the host of the Pharaoh that came into the sea after them; there remained not so much as one of them."

So perished Har-hat and the flower of the Egyptian army.

CHAPTER XLVI

WHOM THE LADY MIRIAM SENT

Of the ensuing day, Kenkenes had no very distinct memory. Very fair and beautiful, one recollection remained—a recollection of another figure on the eminence, and by the flash of white upthrown arms, and the blowing of a somber cloud of hair, this time it was a woman. How the morning sun glittered on the shaken timbrel; how the spotless draperies went wild in the wind; how the group of lissome maidens on the sand below wound in and out, in a mazy dance; how the multitude was swept into transports of beatification; how the men became prophets and the women, psalmists; how the vast wilderness reverberated with a great chant of exultation—all this he remembered as a sublime dream.

Thereafter, Israel moved inland and down the coast some distance, for the sea began to surrender its dead. Of the stir and method of the removal he did not remember, but of the encampment and the reassembling of the tribes he recalled several incidents. He was numb and sleep-heavy beyond words, and while leaning, in a semi-conscious condition, against some household goods, he was discovered by the owner, who was none other than the friendly son of Judah, his assistant in his search for Rachel in Pa-Ramesu. The man's

honest joy over Kenkenes' safety was good to look upon. A few words of explanation concerning his very apparent exhaustion were fruitful of some comfort to the young Egyptian. The Hebrew's wife had a motherly heart, and the weary face of the comely youth touched it. Therefore, she brought him bread and wine and made him a place in the shadow of her tent-furnishings where he might sleep till what time the family shelter could be raised.

But Kenkenes did not rest. He fell asleep only to dream of Rachel, and awoke asking himself why he had abandoned the search for her; why he had left Egypt without her; and why he had not gone to Moses at once for aid to further his seeking through Israel.

He arose from his place, sick with all the old suspense and heartache. He would begin now to look for Rachel and cease not till he found her or died of his weariness.

He stepped forth directly in the path of a party of women. He moved aside to give them room, and glancing at the foremost, recognized her immediately as the Lady Miriam. She stopped and looked at him.

"Thou art he who found Jehovah in Egypt?" she asked.

He bowed in assent.

"Thy faith is entire," she commented. "Also, have I cause to remember thee. Thou didst display a courteous spirit in Tape, a year agone."

"Thou hast repaid me with the flattery of thy remembrance, Lady Miriam," he replied.

"Thy speech publishes thee as noble," she went on calmly. "Thy name?"

"Kenkenes, the son of Mentu, the murket."

Her lips parted suddenly and her eyes gleamed.

"See yonder tent," she said, indicating a pavilion of new cloth, reared not far from the quarters of Moses. "Repair thither and await till I send to thee."

Without pausing for an answer she swept on, her maidens following, damp of brow and bright of eye.

Kenkenes turned toward the tent. A Hebrew at the entrance lifted the side without a word and signed him to enter.

The interior was not yet fully furnished. A rug of Memphian weave covered the sand and a taboret was placed in the center.

Presently the serving-man entered with a laver of sea-water, and an Israelitish robe, fringed and bound at the selvage with blue. With the despatch and adroitness of one long used to personal service, he attended the young Egyptian, and dressed him in the stately garments of his own people. When his service was complete, he took up the bowl and cast-off dress and went forth.

After a time he brought in a couch-like divan, dressed it with fringed linen and strewed it with cushions; next, he suspended a cluster of lamps from the center-pole; set a tiny inlaid table close to the couch, and on the table put a bottle of wine and a beaker; and brought last a heap of fine rugs and coverings which he laid in one corner. The tent was furnished and nobly. The man bowed before Kenkenes, awaiting the Egyptian's further pleasure, but at a sign from the young man, bowed again and retired.

Kenkenes went over to the divan and sat down on it, to wait.

Presently some one entered behind him. He arose

and turned. Before him was the most welcome picture his bereaved eyes could have looked upon. His visitor was all in shimmering white and wore no ornament except a collar of golden rings. What need of further adornment when she was mantled and crowned with a glory of golden hair? Except that the face was marble white and the eyes dark and large with quiet sorrow, it was the same divinely beautiful Rachel!

It may have been that he was beyond the recuperative influence of sudden joy, or that the unexpected restoration of his love might have swept away his forces had he been in full strength; but whatever the cause, Kenkenes sank to his knees and forward into the eager arms flung out to receive him. Her cry of great joy seemed to come to him from afar.

"Kenkenes! O my love! Not dead; not dead!"

Then it was he learned that she had despaired, grieving beyond any comfort, for she had counted him with the first-born of Egypt. And even though thoughts came to him but slowly now, he said to himself:

"Praise God, I did not think of it, or I had gone distracted with her trouble."

How rich woman-love is in solicitude and ministering resource! It made Rachel strong enough to raise him, and having led him back to the divan, gently to lay him down among the cushions. The wine was at her hand, and she filled the beaker, and held it while he drank. Then she kissed him and, hiding her face in his breast, wept soft tears. And though he held her very close and had in his heart a great longing to soothe her, he could not speak.

After a little she spoke.

"I had not dreamed that there was such artifice in Miriam. She told me of a nobleman that had served God and Israel, and was in need of comfort in his tent. But she bridled her tongue and governed her expression so cunningly, that I did not dream the hero was mine—mine!"

Then on a sudden she disengaged herself from his arms and gaining her feet, cried out with her hands over her blushing face:

"And now, I know why she and Hur—O I know why they came with me, and brought me to the tent!"

"Nay, now; may I not guess, also?" Kenkenes laughed, though a little puzzled over her evident confusion. "They had a mind to peep and spy upon our love-making. Perchance they are without this instant; come hither and let us not disappoint them."

She dropped her hands and looked at him with flaming cheeks and smiling eyes. There was more in her look than he could fathom, but he did not puzzle longer when she came back to her place and hid her face away from him.

It is the love of riper years, that makes the lips of lovers silent. But Kenkenes and Rachel were very young and wholly demonstrative, and they had need of many words to supplement the testimony of caresses. They had much to tell and they left no avowal unmade.

But at last Kenkenes' voice wearied and Rachel noted it. So in her pretty authoritative way, she stroked his lashes down and bade him sleep. When she removed her hands and clasped them above his head, his eyes did not open.

As she bent over him, she noted with a great sweep

of tenderness how young he was. In all her relations with Kenkenes she had seen him in the manliest rôles. She had depended upon him, looked up to him, and had felt secure in his protection. Now she contemplated a face from which content had erased the mature lines that care had drawn. The curve of his lips, the length of the drooping lashes, the roundness of cheek, and the softness of throat, were youthful—boyish. With this enlightenment her love for him experienced a transfiguration. She seemed to grow older than he; the maternal element leaped to the fore; their positions were instantly reversed. It was hers to care for him!

After a long time, his arms relaxed about her, and she undid them and disposed them in easy position. Lifting the fillet from his brow, she smoothed out the mark it had made and settled the cushions more softly under his head. From the heap of coverings she took the amplest and the softest and spread it over him. Remembering that the wind from the sea blew shrewdly at night, she laid rugs about the edges of the tent which fluttered in the breeze and returned again to his side.

After another space of rapt contemplation of his unconscious face she went forth and drew the entrance together behind her.

The next daybreak was the happiest Israel had known in a hundred years. Egypt, overthrown and humbled, was behind them; God was with them, and Canaan was just ahead—perhaps only beyond the horizon. Few but would have laughed at the glory of Babylonia, Assyria and the great powers.

For had it not been promised that out of Israel nations should be made, and kings should come?

The march was to be taken up immediately, and in the cool of the morning the host was ready to advance.

Rachel had not permitted herself to be seen until the tent of Miriam was struck. She knew that Kenkenes was without, waiting for her, and with the delightful inconsistency of maidenhood, she dreaded while she longed to meet her beloved again. And when the moment arrived she slipped across the open space to the camel that was to bear her into Canaan, but in the shadow of the faithful creature, Kenkenes overtook her and folded her in his arms.

"A blessing on thee, my sweet! And I am blest in having thee once more."

"Didst thou sleep well?" she asked.

"Most industriously, since I made up what I lost and overlapped a little. And yet I was abroad at dawn prowling about thy tent lest thou shouldst flee me once again. Rachel—" his voice sobered and his face grew serious—"Rachel, wilt thou wed me this day?"

"If it were only 'aye' or 'nay' to be said, I should have said it long ago," she answered with averted eyes, "but there are many things that thou shouldst know, Kenkenes, before thou demandest the answer from me."

"Name them, Rachel," he said submissively; "but let me say this first. Mine eyes are not mystic but most truthfully can I tell this moment, which of us twain will rule over my tent."

"And thou art ready for the tent and shepherd life of Israel?" she asked gravely, but before he could answer she went on.

"Hear me first. So tender hast thou been of me; so much hast thou sacrificed for my sake that it were

unkind to bind thee to me in the life-long sacrifice and life-long hardships that I may know. Thine enemy and mine is dead, and Egypt rid of him. There is much in Egypt to prosper thee; there, thy state is high; there, thou hast opportunity and wealth. Israel can offer thee God and me. Even the faith thou couldst keep in Egypt, so thou wert watchful. And further, thou art the murket's son, and building takes the place of carving for thee, now. But, here, O Kenkenes, thou must lay thy chisel down for ever, for the faith of the multitude, so newly weaned from idolatry, is too feeble to be tried with the sight of images."

Kenkenes heard her with a passive countenance. She gave him news, indeed—facts of a troublous nature, but he held his peace and let her proceed.

"And this, yet further. Once in that time when I was a slave and thou my master and loved me not—"

His dark eyes reproached her.

"Didst love me, then, of a truth? But it matters not —and yet"—coming closer to him, "it matters much! In that time ere thou hadst told me so, we talked of Canaan, thou and I. I boasted of it, being but newly filled with it and freshly come from Caleb who taught us. Then, Israel was enslaved and not yet so vastly helped by Jehovah. But alas! I have seen Israel freed, and attended by its God, and by the tokens of its conduct, Israel is far, far from Canaan. I am of Israel and whosoever weds with me, will be of Israel likewise. It may not be that I shall escape my people's sorrows. Shall I bring them upon thy head, also, my Kenkenes?"

After a little he answered, sighing.

"Thou dost not love me, Rachel."

"Kenkenes!"

"Aye, I have said. Thou wouldst send me away from thee, back into Egypt."

"O, seest thou not? I would have thee know thy heart; I would not have thee choose blindly; I do but sacrifice myself," she cried, panic-stricken.

"And yet, thou wouldst deny me that same delight of sacrifice. Can I not surrender for thee as well?"

She drooped her head and did not answer.

"Ah! thou speakest of the benefits of Egypt," he continued. "What were Egypt without thee, save a great darkness haunted and vacant? Besides, there is no Egypt beyond this sea. She hath risen and crossed with Israel—all her beauty and her glory and her beneficence. For thou art Egypt and shalt be to me all that I loved in Egypt."

He took her hands.

"Why may I not as justly doubt thy knowledge of thy heart?" he asked softly.

Seeing that she surrendered, he persisted no further in his protest.

"When wilt thou wed me, my love?"

She drew back from him a little, though she willingly left her hands where they were, and Kenkenes, noting the flush on her cheeks, the pretty gravity of her brow, and the well-known air she assumed when she discoursed, smiled and said fondly to himself:

"By the signs, I am to be taught something more."

"Thou knowest, my Kenkenes," she began, "the Hebrews are married simply. There is feasting and dancing and the bride is taken to the house of her

father-in-law. Thereafter there is still much feasting, but the wedding ceremony is done at the home-bringing of the bride."

"I hear," said Kenkenes when she paused.

"I am without kindred; thou art here without house. There can be no wedding feast for us, nor dancing nor singing, for Israel is on the march."

"Of a truth," Kenkenes assented.

"So there is only the essential portion of the ceremony left to us—the home-bringing of the bride."

"It is enough," said Kenkenes.

"Hur and Miriam brought me to thy tent last night."

With his face lighting, Kenkenes drew her to him and put his arm about her.

"So if thou wilt, we shall say—that—from—that moment—"

Her voice grew lower, her words more unready and failed altogether.

"From that moment," he said eagerly, reassuring her. "From that moment—"

"From that moment, I have been thy wife!"

CHAPTER XLVII

THE PROMISED LAND

One sunset, shortly after his marriage, word came to the tent of Kenkenes that an Amalekite chieftain on his way to Egypt had paused for the night just without the encampment of Israel.

"Here may be an opportunity to speak with thy father," Rachel suggested. The prospect of talking once again to those he had left behind was one too full of pleasure for the young Egyptian to receive calmly. Hurriedly he despatched one of his serving men to the Amalekite to bid him await a message. But Rachel called the messenger back.

"Tell the Amalekite that thou comest from an Egyptian noble. For such thy master is, and this chieftain is more willing to take command from Egypt than from Israel."

The servant in his enthusiasm and the importance of his mission told the Amalekite that he came from a prince of Egypt.

The chieftain was a youth who had just succeeded his father over his people and was on his way to Memphis bearing tribute to Meneptah. To this tributary nation Egypt was remote, splendid and full of glamour. The name was synonymous of the world and all the glories thereof, and particularly had it appealed to the active imagination of this youth. He had seen many

Egyptians, but they were naked prisoners laboring in the mines of Sinai, or overseers or scribes or the ancient exile who was governor of the province,—and surely these were not representative of the land.

Now he was to get a glance at real Egypt.

In the early hours of the dawn a follower came to his pallet and told him in awed tones that the prince was without. Tremulous with pleasurable trepidation, he went out into the misty daybreak twilight of the open. And there he met an imperial stranger who towered over him as a palm over a shrub. At a single glance the Amalekite saw that there was a circlet of gold about the brow, that the face was fine and that the garments swept the sands. All this was significant, but when the stranger delivered him two rolls, one addressed to the chief of the royal scribes of the Pharaoh, the other to the royal murket, and paid him with a jewel, the Amalekite, convinced and satisfied, prostrated himself.

But we may not know what the youth thought when he found that there were few in all Egypt like this princely stranger.

After these writings came, with all fidelity, to the hands of those who loved him in Egypt, silence fell between them and Kenkenes.

Meneptah erected no more monuments after the eighth year of his reign, for in that year Mentu, the murket, died. None could fill his place, since to his name was attached the title "the Incomparable," as befitted the artist of that great Pharaoh, likewise titled, who had so loved him and his genius. Meneptah, in memory of Mentu and his artist son who had served his king so well, set up no sculptor nor any murket in his place. It was the one graceful act in the life of the

feeble king, the one resolution to which he held most tenaciously.

Though Mentu's union with Senci was short, it was most happy, save perhaps for the absence of Kenkenes. But after the letter came from the well-beloved son there was more cheer in the heart of the father. Kenkenes was not dead, only absent, as he would have been had he lived in Tanis or Thebes. Furthermore, the young man had spoken glowingly and at length on the future of Israel and the Promised Land, and Mentu told himself that he might visit Kenkenes one day in that new country.

Since there were no children in their house, Senci and the murket spoiled Anubis, and in the eyes of his devoted master the ape had earned his soft life. Shortly after the departure of Kenkenes Mentu discovered the ape burying something in the sand of the courtyard flower-beds. In spite of the favorite's vigorous protests Mentu overturned the tiny heap of earth and discovered therein the lapis-lazuli signet. There was but one explanation of the ape's possession of the gem. He had torn the scarab from about the neck of Unas when he flew in his face, the moment the light went out. After his nature, he kept the jewel because it was bright.

All these things—the discovery of the signet in the tomb, the safety of Kenkenes when all the other firstborn had died, and the testimony of the miracles to the power of Israel's God—made the good murket think deeply. Indeed, all Egypt thought deeply after the Exodus of Israel, and to such extremes was this sober thinking carried that through very fear many added the name of the Hebrews' God to the Pantheon.

Mentu did not go so far, because he saw the inconsistency in such procedure, but he shook his head and pondered and was not wholly satisfied with many things in the Osirian creed.

Of the love of Hotep and Masanath something yet remains to be told. It was common to examine the entire family of a traitor as to their complicity in his misdeeds, and the option lay with the Pharaoh whether or not they should bear some of his punishment. Har-hat was dead, the army destroyed at his hands. When the news of the disaster reached Tanis Meneptah's anger and grief knew no bounds.

After Rameses had been interred at Thebes beside his fathers, and the court had returned to Memphis, the king summoned Masanath, the sole representative of the family of Har-hat, to give reason why she should not be accused of complicity in the treason of her father.

Meneptah had taken counsel with none on this step. Perhaps he had an inkling that it would be unpopular; perhaps he thought he was but fulfilling the law. Hotep was at On comforting his family, who mourned over Bettis, and most of the other ministers were scattered over Egypt lamenting their own dead, and few expected the ungallant act of the king.

But one day, when all the court had reassembled, Masanath came into the great council chamber. Alone and dressed in mourning, she seemed so little and defenseless that Meneptah stirred uncomfortably in his throne. Slowly she approached the dais and fell on her knees before the king. The great gathering of courtiers held its breath, wondering and pitying.

Such was the scene upon which Hotep came all un-

knowing. At a glance he understood the situation. It was too much for his well-bridled spirit. With a cry, full of horror, indignation and compassion, he dropped his writing-case and scroll, and, rushing forward, flung himself on his knees beside her, one arm about her, the other extended in supplication to the Pharaoh.

Meneptah, who, from the moment of Masanath's entrance into the council chamber, had begun to repent his ill-advised act, was glad to be won over. At the end of Hotep's impassioned story he came down from the dais, and raising Masanath, kissed her and put her into the young man's arms. Supplementing his pardon with command, he ordered his scribe to marry the sad little orphan at once and take her away from the scene of her sorrows till Isis restored her in spirits again.

The alacrity with which this royal command was obeyed proved how acceptable it was to the lovers. By the next sunset they were going by a slow and sumptuous boat down the broad bosom of the Nile toward the sea, but they had no care whether or not they ever reached their destination.

After some months spent on the coast, Masanath grew stronger and began to live with much appreciation of the joys of existence. On their return to Memphis Hotep was made fan-bearer in Har-hat's place, and for the remaining fourteen years of Meneptah's reign practically ruled over Egypt.

Vastly different, however, was his favoritism from the favoritism of Har-hat. During the wise administration of the young adviser Egypt recovered something of her former glory, lost in the dreadful plague-ridden days preceding the Exodus. The army was reorganized first, for Ta-user's party began to make dem-

onstrations the hour that the news of the Red Sea disaster reached the Hak-heb. All public building and national extravagance were halted, and the surplus treasure was expended in restocking the fields and granaries and restoring commerce. Within five years after the Exodus the great check Egypt had met in her nineteenth dynasty was not greatly apparent.

So the land recovered from the plagues, but its ruler never. The death of Rameses lay like a heavy sin and torturing remorse on his conscience. He wept till the feeble eyes lost their sight, but not their susceptibility to tears. At last, succumbing to melancholia, he became a child, for whom Hotep reigned and for whom the queen cared with touching devotion.

The story of Seti is history. It is needless to say that his rough usage at the hands of Ta-user awakened him, but it was long before he found courage to return to Io, the sweetheart of his childhood. Yet, when he did, after the manner of her kind, she wept over him and took him back without a word of reproach. So the fair-faced sister of Hotep came to be queen over Egypt and took another title with Nefer-ari as prefix, and the quaint Danaid name, Io, was lost to all lips but Seti's and Hotep's.

After Seti came to the throne he continued Hotep in the advisership and prepared to reign happily. But in a little time the Thebaid, long disaffected, seceded from the federation of Egypt and crowned Amon-meses king of Thebes. Seti gathered his army, marched against the rebellious district, put Amon-meses to the sword and reduced the Thebaid to submission. Then he returned to Memphis for another space of prosperity.

At the end of a year Ta-user and Siptah, after much browbeating of the Hak-heb, raised funds sufficient to purchase mercenaries. Then, with Ta-user at the head in barbaric splendor, they descended on Memphis.

The course Seti pursued has puzzled historians. He gathered up his family, his court, his treasure, and without so much as lifting a spear, fled into Ethiopia. After some time Ta-user sent to him and conferred upon him the title of the Prince of Cush.

To the friends of the young Pharaoh it was patent that he feared to meet Ta-user. Having succumbed once to her influence, to his undoing and the misery of his beloved Io, he dared not come under the all-compelling eyes of the sorceress again. So he surrendered his crown and his country for his soul's sake.

But fifty years after, Seti's son, the formidable Set-Nekt, returned into Egypt and restored the Rameside house on a basis so solid that another glorious dynasty arose thereon, second only in brilliance to that which had gone out in the anarchy of Siptah and Ta-user's reign. This done, he wreaked personal vengeance upon the usurpers of his father's throne. He broke open the tomb of Siptah and Ta-user, threw out their bodies to the jackals, obliterated the inscriptions, enlarged the crypt, put his own and his father's history on the walls and used it for his mausoleum when he died.

And this was the deadliest retaliation he could inflict in his father's name.

Much of this Kenkenes learned from the lips of Egyptian merchants whom he met in Canaan, forty years after the Exodus.

Kenkenes was a proselyte who had found his God for himself. He believed as he drew his breath and as

his heart beat, involuntarily and without any lapse. Never could a son of Israel have surrendered himself more eagerly to the law. Its good and its purposes were ever before his eyes, and his footsteps led in the paths that it lighted. Though he saw not the Lord in a burning bush nor talked with Him on Sinai, he found Him on the lonely uplands of the sheep-ranges and heard Him in the voiceless night on the limitless desert. The young Egyptian was not yet twenty years old at the time of the numbering before Sinai, and he entered the Promised Land with Joshua and Caleb. For verily he walked with God all the days of his life.

It must not be supposed that there was no serene life nor any happiness in the long wandering of forty years. A generation of oriental adults practically dies out in that time. The passing of the elders of Israel, though it was accomplished by plagues and sendings for iniquities, was as the passing of the old in the Orient to-day. The encampment was not continually filled with calamity and great mourning—far from it. There were long stretches of peace and plenty, extending almost uninterruptedly for years, and those who followed the law escaped the intervals of catastrophe.

Kenkenes was among the chosen people but not of them, partly because he was of the execrated race of the oppressors and partly because the most of Israel had nothing in common with the nobleman. But Moses loved him and found joy in his company. Joshua loved him and had him by his side when Israel warred. Caleb and Aaron loved him because he was godly, and Miriam was proud of him and was mild in his presence. He took no public part in the people's affairs, yet who shall say that he was not near when Bezaleel wrought

the wondrous angels for the ark? Who shall say that his purest jewel did not enter the breast-plate of the high priest? There are many names embraced in that general term, "every wise-hearted man among them that wrought the work of the tabernacle."

So when Israel took up the forty years of pasture-hunting in Paran, Kenkenes made his tent beautiful and pitched it always apart from the multitude, and here he was contented all the days that Israel tarried in that place. Under his care his flocks increased, his cattle multiplied and his camels were not few, and he laid up riches for the four stalwart sons and the golden-haired daughter who were to live after him.

From the moment of his union with his beautiful wife, through the long years of semi-isolation that he knew thereafter, he grew closer and closer to Rachel. She filled all his needs as Israel failed to supply them, and he missed neither friend nor neighbor when she was near. Rachel knew wherein she was more fortunate than other women and her content and her devotion were beyond measure. So Kenkenes and Rachel were lovers all the days of their lives.

If ever they grew reminiscent there was one name spoken more tenderly than any other—the name of Atsu. Kenkenes would grow sad of countenance and he would look away, but there was no jealousy in his heart for the tears of Rachel weeping over the task-master who died for her.

The collar of golden rings became popular in Israel, and, after many modifications effected by time and fashion, it came at last to be the insignia of the virtuous woman. For centuries it was worn and no one knows when the custom died out.

The genius of Kenkenes did not die. His voice enriched with age, and the rocky vales wherein his flocks wandered had melodious echoes whenever he followed the sheep. But he never used chisel upon stone again. His sons were artists after him, but they were handicapped also. And so it continued for many generations until the Temple of Solomon was built. Then, though the plans came from the Lord, and artisans were brought from Tyre, it was the descendants of Kenkenes who made the Temple beautiful "with carved figures of cherubim and palm trees and open flowers, within and without."

THE END

AUTHOR'S NOTE

When the Chaldeans prostrated themselves before Nebuchadnezzar, they cried: "O King, live forever!" When patrician Rome hailed Nero in the Circus, the acclaim was: "Vivat Imperator!" When the faithful saluted the Caliph, they said: "May thy shadow never grow less."

Humanity, living in eternal contemplation of the tomb, offers its highest tribute in bespeaking immortality for its great.

But Egypt did not invoke the gift of deathlessness upon the Pharaoh; she declared it. He was an Immortal and died not. Though he more nearly justified the confident declaration of his people, he but proved that there is no sublunar immortality, though in Egypt—almost.

The Pharaoh lived with a triple purpose: the perpetuity of his empire, of his dynasty, of his individuality. He steeped his body in indestructibility and wrote his name in adamant. He employed the manifold means at the command of his era, and whether his monument were a colossus, a temple or a city, he builded well.

While Europe was yet a vast tract of gloomy forests, and morasses, and plains, while the stone that was to rear Troy was yet scattered on the slopes of Ida, Mena, the first Pharaoh of the first Dynasty, deflected the Nile against the Arabian hills and built

Memphis in its bed. So say the writings that are graven in stone. If this be true, this story deals with a quaint but efficient civilization that was already three thousand years old, fourteen centuries before Christ.

An effort has been made to conform to the history of the time as it comes down to us in the form of biblical accounts and the writings of contemporaneous chroniclers. The author has taken liberty with accepted history in the age of Moneptah's first-born and in placing Hebrews in the quarries at Masaarah. The escape of Kenkenes in the Passover is not intended to contradict the biblical statement that not one of the eldest born was spared. Rather, it is offered, as an hypothesis, that the Angel of Death would have passed over any true believer in Jehovah, regardless of his nationality. Furthermore, the author has given the Greek spelling to some names, the Egyptic to others, the purpose being to present those pronunciations most familiar to readers.

For all facts herein set forth, the author is indebted to a multitude of authorities, chiefly to Wilkinson, Birch, Rawlinson, Ebers, and Erman.

LIST OF CHARACTERS AND PLACES

Abydos,–*A-by'-dos*, city of Upper Egypt and burial-place of Osiris.

Amenti,–*A-men'-tee*, the realm of Death.

Amon-meses,–*Ay'-mon-mee'-seez*, half-brother to Meneptah and hostile to him.

Anubis.–*A-niu'-bis*, pet ape named after the jackal-headed god.

Apepa,–*A-pay'-pah*, a Hyksos monarch who befriended Joseph.

Asar-Mut,–*Ay'-sar-Moot'*, half-brother to Meneptah and high priest to Ptah.

Athor,–*Ah'-thor*, the feminine love-deity.

Atsu,–*At'-soo*, a noble Egyptian, vice-commander over the works at Pa-Ramesu, afterwards degraded.

Baal-Zephon,–*Bay'-al-Zee'-phon*, a hill at the northern end of the Red Sea.

Bast,–*Bahst*, the cat-headed goddess, patron deity of Bubastis.

Besa,–*Bee'-sah*, a dwarf-like deity similar to the Roman Cupid.

Bettis,–*Bet'-tis*, older sister to Hotep and Io.

Bubastis,–*Biu-bast'-is*, city in lower Egypt near Goshen.

Deborah,–*Deb'-or-ah*, an aged woman of Israel, Rachel's attendant.

Hak-heb,–*Hayk'-heb*, a village on the Nile, shipping point for Nehapehu, fifty miles south of Memphis.

Har-hat,–*Hahr'-hat*, fan-bearer, or prime minister to the Pharaoh; father of Masanath.

Hathors,–*Hah'-thorz*, seven personifications of Athor, usually seven cows, similar to the fates of Roman and Greek mythology.

Hotep,–*Hoe'-tep*, the royal scribe, friend of Kenkenes, brother of Bettis and Io.

Hyksos,–*Hick'-soz*, the Shepherd Kings.

Imhotep,–*Eem-hoe'-tep*, the physician god.

Ipsambul,–*Ip-sahm'-bool*, a temple cut from living rock.

Io,–*Eye'–o.* younger sister to Hotep and Bettis, in love with Sett.

Isis,–*Eye'-sis,* consort to Osiris and goddess of wisdom.

Jambres,–*Jam'-breez,* a priest in disgrace, sometime astrologer to Rameses II and to Meneptah.

Kenkenes,–*Ken-ken'-eez,* son of Mentu, the murket.

Khem,–*Kem,* the Egyptian Pan.

Khu-n-Aten,–*Khoon-Ah'-ten,* Amenhotep IV, a Pharaoh of the eighteenth dynasty, who attempted to reform the national faith.

Loi,–*Lo'-ee,* high-priest to Amen at Karnak.

Ma,–*Mah,* the goddess of truth.

Masaarah,–*Mah-saar'-ah,* a limestone quarry opposite Memphis.

Masanath,–*Ma-sayn'-ath,* second daughter to Har-hat, beloved of Hotep.

Meneptah,–*Me-nep'-tah,* successor to Rameses II, and Pharaoh of the Exodus.

Menes,–*Meen'-eez,* captain of the royal guard.

Mentu,–*Men'-too,* the murket or royal architect, father of Kenkenes.

Merenra,–*Mer-en'-rah,* commander over the works at Pa-Ramesu.

Mesu,–*May'-soo,* Moses, the Law-giver.

Mizraim,–*Miz'-ray-im,* the Hebrew name for Egypt.

Mut,–*Moot,* the mother goddess.

Nari,–*Nahr'-ee,* the handmaiden of Masanath.

Nechutes,–*Nee-koo'-teez,* the royal cup-bearer.

Nehapehu,–*Nee-hay'-pe-hiu,* a fertile pocket in the Libyan desert, fifty miles south of Memphis.

Neferari Thermuthis,–*Nef-er-ahr'-ee Ther-moo'-this,* first consort to Rameses II and foster mother of Moses.

Nomarch,–*Nome'-ark,* governor of a civil division called a nome.

On, Heliopolis,–near the site of the modern Cairo.

Osiris,–*Oh-sy'-ris,* the great god of Egypt, the principle of good, the creator.

Pa-Ramesu,–*Pay-Ram'-e-soo,* a treasure city begun by Rameses II.

Paraschites,–*Par-a-shy'-teez,* embalmers, an unclean class.

Pentaur,–*Pen'-tor*, an Egyptian priest and poet of the time of Rameses II.

Pepi,–*Pay'-pee*, servant of Masanath.

Pharaoh,–*Fay'-roe*, title given to the Egyptian monarchs.

Pithom,–*Py'-thom*, a treasure city built by Rameses II.

Ptah,–*P-tah'*, the patron deity of Memphis.

Punt,–*Poont*, Arabia.

Ra,–*Rah*, the sun god, patron deity of On.

Rachel,–daughter of Maai of Israel, beloved of Kenkenes.

Rameses,–*Ram'-e-seez*, a popular name for Egyptian kings; the name of Meneptah's older son and also the name of Meneptah's father, the Incomparable Pharaoh.

Ranas,–*Rah'-nas*, the servant of Snofru.

Sema,–*See'-mah*, an aged servant of Mentu.

Senci,–*Sen'-cee*, a lady of noble birth, aunt of Hotep and his sisters.

Set,–the god of war and evil.

Seti,–*Set'-ee*, second son to Meneptah, beloved of Io.

Siptah,–*Sip'-tah*, son of Amon-meses and claimant to the Egyptian throne.

Snofru,–*Sno'-froo*, priest of Ra at On.

Tahennu,–*Tah-hen'-niu*, a fair-haired tribe on the Mediterranean, which was exterminated by Seti I.

Ta-meri,–*Tam'-e-ree*, daughter of the nomarch of Memphis and beloved by Nechutes.

Tanis,–*Tay'-nis*, the Egyptian name for Zoan.

Tape,–*Tay'-pay*, Thebes.

Ta-user,–*Tay-oo'-ser*, a princess of the realm and beloved of Siptah.

Thebaid,–*Thee-bay'-id*, civil division embracing Thebes and surrounding towns.

Thebes,–*Theebz*, capital of Upper Egypt and largest city in Egypt.

Toth,–*Tote*, the male deity of wisdom and law.

Tuat,–*Tiu'-ayt*, the Egyptian Hades.

Unas,–*Yu'-nas*, servant to Har-hat.

Wady Toomilat,–*Wah'-dee Toom'-ee-laht*, great Rameside road leading into the Orient.

Zoan.–*Zoe'-an*, the capital of the Delta.

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